BUILDING A THRIVING AND DIVERSE SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY: DESERT OUTREACH SYNAGOGUE CASE STUDY

A Professional Research Project

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

Julian King

May 2021

This professional project completed by

JULIAN KING

has been presented to and accepted by
the Faculty of the Claremont School of Theology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Faculty Committee
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ABSTRACT

BUILDING A THRIVING AND DIVERSE SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY:

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by

Julian King

The need is for Jews who identify as secular, atheist, agnostic, unaffiliated, disenfranchised, and their families who are not Jewish to have a spiritual home in the Coachella Valley. I will build the case and demonstrate whom they are, what they are involved in, and what I have done and am doing to engage and bring them in. This Practical Research project will be an in-depth review of synagogue life in ancient Judaism, its evolution, people, and participation. It will be a case-study of the launch, focusing on our marketing approach to continued development of Desert Outreach Synagogue even in times of a pandemic.

I have chosen to use a case study along with a survey in my quest to discover and better understand our temple demographics. I also wanted to know the level of participation for those who attend and get their opinions on our current interfaith worship practices to move us forward.

Acknowledgments

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Chapter One:

Introduction

Over the past four or five decades, synagogues in the United States have faced decreasing membership, stagnant or dwindling attendance, tough financial conditions, and major demographic changes. All of these problems are having a profound impact on the survival of temple life. Those temples that continue to thrive or, at the very least, maintain themselves do so based on the popularity of their leadership. It is often the dynamic leadership of the rabbi, but other times it is the cantor who sustains membership or even brings new members. Other synagogues keep afloat through the success of their schools. Even taking these exceptions into account, the vast majority of temples are struggling for their very existence. If we are to survive, we must seize the potential opportunities for growth and examine the ways in which we cannot only continue to exist but thrive as a temple without walls. I will discuss what and how we are doing this in my own "temple without walls" as part of this project.

The Coachella Valley comprises several cities with a population of about 500,000 to more than 800,000 during the high season. There are about 30,000 Jewish people in the desert. Many of them are married, partnered, and/or have family who are non-Jewish. The comments that I hear frequently are that while there are several other synagogues in the area, most are not truly inclusive.

We have established an alternative temple based and centered in the mid-valley, which allows us to draw from all parts of the Coachella Valley. The other major difference is that we do not hold weekly services but will have different events and ways for community building, engagement, and connecting to each other.

I believe that many would like to reconnect with their Judaism and affiliate with a local synagogue, along with the many family members and friends who identify as other. We must determine, however, how we will effectively reach out to them. What will we do to change the conversation in our synagogues and communities in which we serve? Many Jews find services boring, tedious, dull, repetitive, predictable, and uninspiring. While we should not use such a broad brush to paint all synagogues, I believe that with the level of participation and attendance at such an abysmally low rate, we need to explore why. In the many conversations I have been part of, boredom is certainly one of the top reasons people choose not to attend. I have found that at my new "temple without walls" as I greet those who come to services, attenders will often tell me that the reason they are either coming for the first time or joining as a member is that they were tired of the same thing. They were bored with the stodgy liturgy and lack of creativity. I have and continue to build and develop a temple that will attract Jews who are not religious, secular, agnostic, atheist, and anyone searching for a place to be with others in their community and worship. We use music as our primary foundation and the Torah, texts, prayers, and traditions of Judaism to inform and inspire those who attend.

The Ancient Synagogue

I believe it is critically important to take a historical look back into ancient Judaism to understand better tradition along with the evolution of synagogue life and our people as the foundation upon which we build our alternative congregation and community here in the Coachella Valley. In the Torah, there is mention of or reference to a sacred place of community and worship is that of Solomon's temple. The text from I Kings 5–9 describes this temple constructed during Israel and Judah's united sovereignty. The Torah names Hiram of Tyre as the

one who provided architects, workers, and cedar timbers for the temple's construction. The first book of Kings provides us with the approximate date of the temple's construction:

א וַיְהִי בִשְׁמוֹנִים שָׁנָה וְאַרְבַּע מֵאוֹת שָׁנָה לְצֵאת בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֶרֶץ-מִצְרַיִם בַּשָּׁנָה הָרְבִיעִית בְּחֹדֶשׁ זִו, הוּא הַחֹדֶשׁ הַשֵּׁנִי, לִמְלֹךְ שְׁלֹמֹה, עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל; וַיִּבֶן הַבַּיִת, לַיהוָה.

1 And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Ziv, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the LORD.[1]

Solomon reigned from about 970 to 931 BCE, which places the temple's construction in the middle of the tenth century BCE. Some scholars speculate that a sanctuary predates this one. I Kings 9:10 states that it took Solomon twenty years to build the Temple along with his royal palace:

י וַיְהִי, מִקְצֵה עֶשְׂרִים שָׁנָה, אֲשֶׁר-בָּנָה שְׁלֹמֹה, אֶת-שְׁנֵי הַבָּתִּים--אֶת-בֵּית יְהוָה, וְאֶת-בֵּית הַמֶּלֶךְ.

10 And it came to pass at the end of twenty years, wherein Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the LORD and the king's house—

From Moses's time until the restoration of the Second Temple, people would fulfill their obligation to pray daily by composing their prayers and praying privately. The destruction of the

[1] 1 Kings 6:1.

First Temple led to the creation of the first synagogues, many of which date back to the third century BCE. In Greek, a synagogue (*synagog*) means "assembly." In Hebrew, the synagogue is referred to by various terms, including a *bet kneset* בית כנסת, which is a "house of assembly" or a *bet tefila* בית תפילה *bet tefila*, which is a "house of prayer." Also, it can be referred to as a *shul* שול*shul*, אסנוגה *esnoga,* or קהל *kahal*. The simplest way to think of it is as a Jewish house of prayer. Historically synagogues had a large hall for prayer, often called the main sanctuary, and smaller rooms for study. In modern times, there may be additional spaces like a social hall or administrative offices. Some have a separate room for Torah study, called the *beit midrash* (Sephardi) or *beis midrash* (Ashkenazi)— (בית מדרש house of study).

By the Second Temple period (530 BCE-70 CE), Lee Levine argues that the term synagogue "had two possible meanings: a group of people, a community; or a building, an institution."[2] Levine details how the synagogue was a "central institution in Jewish life" by the Romans' destruction of the Second Temple 70 CE (Levine 1987).[3]

Most everything changed after the destruction of the Second Temple and Jerusalem in 70 CE throughout Jewish life and the synagogue's emerging life. Out of the Second Temple's ruins sprung new life in Judaism in places like Galilee and Babylonia during late antiquity. Synagogues played a variety of roles and filled many societal functions. Eventually, it became the hallmark and symbol of Jewish communal life. As a result, its rituals became a standard and official practice.

Absent an official temple, new rituals developed in the face of new realities. Jewish leaders replaced sacrifice and libations with the study of the Torah and prayer in the synagogues.

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[2] Lee I. Levine, *The Synagogue in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: The American Schools of Oriental Research, 1987), 9.

[3] Levine, *Synagogue in Late Antiquity*, 10.

Levine calls this the "ever-changing repertoire of practices."[4] his included the development of sermons and other liturgical additions like *piyyut* (poems). An important question to ask ourselves is: what is the origin of religious change? Does it occur as an inevitable process, or does it happen *in response* to disruption like the Jewish people witnessed during the First and Second Temple periods? What is clear is that even during these ancient periods of our history, Temple life evolved to meet the Jewish people's demands and wishes. Moreover, the term "synagogue" did not designate just a special building or structure. Rather, it also came to mean a group of people who gathered together regularly for functions both sacred and non-sacred. What is certain is that the synagogue was and continues to be the center of Jewish life.

Temple versus Synagogue

An exploration of the terms "temple" and "synagogue" reveal many associations and possibilities. Synagogue, also spelled synagog, is in Judaism a community house of worship that serves as a place for liturgical services and assembly and study. Its traditional functions are reflected in three Hebrew synonyms for synagogue: bet ha-tefilla ("house of prayer"), bet ha-kneset ("house of assembly"), and bet ha-midrash ("house of study"). The term synagogue is of Greek origin (synagein, "to bring together") and means "a place of assembly." The Yiddish word shul (from German Schule, "school") is also used to refer to the synagogue, and in modern times the word temple is common among some Reform and Conservative congregations.[5] We use several synonyms for the word temple: house of God, houses of worship, shrine, sanctuary, church, cathedral, mosque, synagogue, shul, and fane. Some of the more commonly used

[4] Levine, *Synagogue in Late Antiquity*, 8.

[5] Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Synagogue," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Brian Duigan ed., December 19, 2020, https://www.britannica.com/topic/synagogue.

Hebrew terms for a Temple are:

Temple, sanctuary, shrine	מקדש
Temple, sanctuary	בית מקדש
Temple	בית המקדש
Temple	רקה
Temple	היכל
House, habitation, repository, haunt, home, temple	משקן

This study defines "a synagogue is a place dedicated to Jewish worship and instruction."[6]

Some commonly used Hebrew terms to designate a synagogue or a house of prayer are:

Synagogue	בית כנסת
Synagogue	בהכינ
Synagogue	ביהכינ
Chapel, synagogue, house of prayer	בית תפלה
Synagogue, school, seminary	בית מקרש

According to an article published by Wilhelm Bacher and Lewis N. Dembitz found in the Jewish Encyclopedia states that "the origin of the synagogue, in which the congregation gathered to worship and to receive the religious instruction connected therewith, is wrapped in obscurity.

[6] Megan Sauter, "Ancient Synagogues in Israel and the Diaspora," Biblical Archaeology Society, accessed November 1, 2020, https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/temple-at-jerusalem/ancient-synagogues-in-israel-and-the-diaspora.https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/temple-at-jerusalem/ancient-synagogues-in-israel-and-the-diaspora.

By the time it had become the central institution of Judaism (no period of the history of Israel is conceivable without it), it was already regarded as of ancient origin, dating back to the time of Moses (see Yer. Targ., Ex. xviii. 20 and I Chron. xvi. 39; Pesiḳ. 129b; Philo, "De Vita Mosis," iii. 27; Josephus, "Contra Ap." ii., § 17; Acts xv. 21). The "house of the people" (Jer. xxxix. 8 [Hebr.]) is interpreted, in a midrash cited by Rashi and Ḳimḥi (ad loc.), as referring to the synagogue, and "bet 'amma," the Aramaic form of this phrase, was the popular designation in the second century for the synagogue (Simeon b. Eleazar, in Shab. 32a).

The synagogue as a permanent institution originated probably in the period of the Babylonian captivity when a place for common worship and instruction had become necessary. The great prophet, in the second part of the Book of Isaiah, in applying the phrase "house of prayer" to the Temple to be built at Jerusalem (Isa. lvi. 7 and, according to the very defensible reading of the LXX., also lx. 7), may have used a phrase which, in the time of the Exile, designated the place of united worship; this interpretation is possible, furthermore, in such passages as Isa. lviii. 4. The term was preserved by the Hellenistic Jews as the name for the synagogue (προσευχή = οἶκος προσευχῆς; comp. also the allusion to the "proseucha" in Juvenal, "Satires," iii. 296).

After the return from the Captivity, when the religious life was reorganized, especially under Ezra and his successors, congregational worship, consisting of prayer and the reading of sections from the Bible, developed side by side with the revival of the cult of the Temple at Jerusalem, and thus led to the building of synagogues. The place of meeting was called "bet ha-keneset," since an assembly of the people for worship was termed a "keneset"; the assembly described in Neh. ix.-x. was known in tradition as the "great assembly" ("keneset ha-gedolah";

see Synagoġue, The Great). The synagogue continued to be known by this name, although it was also called, briefly, "keneset" (Aramaic, "kanishta"), and, in Greek, συναγωγή.[7]

When I think of the words "temple" or "synagogue," the word that also comes to my mind is "sanctuary." The term sanctuary has two meanings. On the one hand, a sanctuary is a place where one sits to listen, pray, and convene as a community. But it also conjures up the imagery of safety, security, and a place of refuge. It is fascinating that most of the Hebrew words used to denote a temple or synagogue also are synonyms for "sanctuary." Additional synonyms for the word sanctuary are: refuge, haven, harbor, a port in a storm, oasis, shelter, retreat, hideaway, hideout, safety, protection, shelter, immunity, and asylum.[8] In Hebrew, they are:

Shelter, refuge, asylum, haven, sanctuary	מקלט
Sanctum, sanctuary, shrine	מקום קדוש
Sanctuary	קודש הקדושים
Sanctuary	דביר
Rest, peace, ease, resting place, quiet, sanctuary	מנוח
Reservation, sanctuary	שמורת טבע
Sanctuary	היכל קדוש

Later in the thesis, I will reflect on the concept of the "temple without walls," especially as it relates to several case studies, and finally, with Desert Outreach Synagogue that I founded

[7] Wilhelm Bacher and Lewis N. Dembitz, "Synagogue," in *Jewish Encyclopedia,* Isidore Singer ed., accessed November 1, 20202, http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14160-synagogue.
[8] Dictionary.com, "Sanctuary," accessed November 1, 2020, http://www.dictionary.com/browse/sanctuary.

in late 2016. I examine further the various uses of these words. This is especially relevant in light of the new and rising trend in Judaism to launch new religious institutions.

Synagogue Life

The ancient synagogue and temple life has shown us that they were hugely impacted as a community especially after the second temple was destroyed. David B. Green writes, "Following the destruction of the Second Temple during the First Revolt and the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem itself, accompanied by the exile of its inhabitants, during the Second Jewish Revolt, in 132-135, that Judaism made a sharp turn from being a temple-based cult that relied on daily sacrifices to its god. It became a mobile faith that revolved around law and prayer, and whose members soon spread out around the Mediterranean basin, and later to more distant points. The synagogue replaced the single Temple but recalled the sanctuary by always being physically oriented in the direction of Jerusalem. Prayer took the place of animal sacrifices.[9] These were major shifts and changes and so it seems to me that we, too, are at the point of needing to change our paradigm and seek ways to change today to be relevant and yet are able to do so while honoring our traditions and teachings.

What are the people's important life questions and longings? How does the religious community and the Jewish community, in particular, speak to these issues? How does the "temple without walls" address our current cultural and spiritual situation? I believe through many conversations and observance and reading many and varied sources… that most Jewish people are much more interested in cultural, secular, educational, and less interested in religion.

[9] David Green, "The History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem," *Ha'aretz*, accessed February 13, 2021, https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/.premium-history-of-the-temple-in-jerusalem-1.5256337.

My project will bear out later on the engagement and involvement of Jews in temple life. I am convinced that most are not religious, and it is not part of our longings in life as our primary motivation. Yet, it is not to say that synagogues are irrelevant. I would argue that more than ever they provide a central place in our communities for Jewish life that provides worship, social connection, various activities and education.

I believe that the "temple without walls" allows us to build a congregation and community that is not encumbered with massive debt, huge overhead costs, capital campaigns, and gives us the ability to expand as we grow. It also allows us to be less confined by the physical structure and the rigid traditional structure, whether liturgy, traditions, or other. We are able to address our current and spiritual situation in a less formal environment and yet provide spiritual direction to those attending. The next chapter is a dive into defining the need for spiritual community… who and where are they.

What I know for certain is that what we do matters. Even in the twenty-first century, synagogues matter. Religious affiliation matters. After the 2nd Temple was destroyed, life for the Jewish people changed dramatically, resulting in the emergence of new life in the synagogue and in new places with traditional practice and new rituals as mentioned earlier. We live in vastly different times and especially so with a pandemic to cause us to recognize that things cannot and will not remain the same. We must re-examine everything we are doing for our congregations and communities to be and stay connected. We can and should use the temples in antiquity with the changing of their times to embrace our need for change and to become a model of innovation in the 21st century.

We must be willing to change our vision and ideas about the community we serve and our wants, desires and needs. It will require a major paradigm shift that may push and test the

limits of our historical norms. While I believe that worship can and should play a major role in our lives, I do not believe it is the end-all, and there must be other ways to meet the needs of our congregation and community. Education has always been front and center to our values and traditions as a people. It is and has been a huge part of our very DNA. We have a long and rich history in both the secular and religious realms of making our world better for our children and ourselves. Even though the focus on religious life and values has declined as more Jews embraced secularism, I am still convinced that we can and should offer both. We should not completely sacrifice one for the other. All age groups should concern themselves with the study of our collective Jewish history, traditions, and culture. This focus on learning is bound to create more interest in our congregational and community life.

The term synagogue conjures up images in our minds of a place of worship. The synagogue is the building that we use for our Bar and Bat Mitzvah services, worship on a Friday evening or Shabbat morning, weddings, and much more. Synagogues come in all shapes and sizes. In the Second Temple period, however, the word described a certain architectural building that housed certain types of activities. Jews referred to the amphitheater as a synagogue. Location dictated the type and usage of the building. Other variables played a key role in the synagogue, such as how often they were used and frequented, demographics of the area that included the origin of its people and their professions.

Interestingly, however, worship did not focus on prayer as much as it did on reading the Torah. Levine mentions an ancient synagogue in Jerusalem which has the following inscription:

> Theodotus, son of Vettenos the priest and archisynagogos, son of an archisynagogos and grandson of an archisynagogos, built the synagogue for reading the Law and studying the commandments, and as a hostel with chambers and water installations to provide for the needs of itinerants from abroad, which (that is, the synagogue) his fathers, the elders and Simonides founded.[10]

[10] Levine, *Synagogue in Late Antiquity,* 17.

The lack of mention of prayer in the inscription at the synagogue of Theodotus is noteworthy. It begs the question why it was excluded. Was prayer not performed here due to its location? Or was there another reason?

"The synagogue is the center of the Jewish religious community: a place of prayer, study, and education, social and charitable work, as well as a social center."[11] The synagogue has played a key role in the lives of people in various ways. While the synagogue of the past is critically important in our history and our future, I believe that being relevant for modern times and changing to meet the demands and desires of our communities today is essential. Our demographics have changed, interfaith marriages are on the rise, religion is not nearly as important in the lives of many, and the reality is that we live in a very different world. In my research of looking at what others are doing to change the paradigm and create an alternative that will attract and engage people, it is apparent that doing business is drastically altered. But before we do this, we must answer the following questions. Who are we? How do our current demographics impact the evolution of American synagogues now and in the future? We can take nothing for granted, as most everything we have known or expected is up for grabs. Synagogue Studies Institute expresses this state of flux:

> Synagogues at the forefront of Jewish life have rightly become concerned about the changeover from the baby-boomers to their children, the twenty- and thirty-year old's whom sociologists call Gen X and Gen Y. At stake is Jewish continuity, particularly in the liberal sector, that 90% or so of Jews are not necessarily committed to significant Jewish identity. Coordinating a sustained and successful engagement strategy to the next generation is the next frontier in synagogue life."[12]

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[11] Editors of Jewish Virtual Library, "The Synagogue: Background and Overview," *Jewish Virtual Library*, accessed: November 1, 2020, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/synagogue-background-and-overview.

[12] *Synagogue Studies Institute*, "An Invitation to the Next Synagogue Frontier," accessed December 19, 2020, https://www.synagoguestudies.org/invitation-next-synagogue-frontier.

In our modern world, people have come to expect and receive the personal attention and an experience that is meaningful versus a mechanical and routine based on doing the same thing just because of tradition. This can be seen and experienced by going to your local bank and the teller calling you by name, or to Starbucks, or many local businesses because personalizing with using someone's name along with creating the ambience that has the possibility of taking it to the next level.

Chapter Two:

The Need for Spiritual Community. Who and Where Are They?

This project starts with an analysis of the demographics of both Jews and their families, partners, spouses, and others. I provide an overview of the various aspects and purpose for Jewish families as to how they interact with the wider community and how they are impacted in daily Jewish life. Next, I examine what role—if any—the "temple without walls" will play in this century and beyond. If we are to survive, we must seize potential opportunities for growth and examine the ways in which we cannot only continue to exist but can thrive as a temple without walls. I will review what and how we are doing this in my own "temple without walls" as part of this project.

A Pew Research Center report from 2013 examined numerous aspects of Jewish life in America. They looked at Jews from various denominations and religious affiliations and analyzed synagogue attendance. A review of this essential data provides us with much insight into those individual Jews and Jewish families' daily lives that we are trying to attract to Jewish institutions. The following table lays out important demographic information from the 2013 study.

Table 1. Denominational Identity[13]

	All Jews	Synagogue Members
No Denomination	30%	6%
Reform	35%	39%
Conservative	18%	29%
Orthodox	10%	22%
Other	6%	4%

It is relevant to note that the largest denomination is the Reform movement. They have the highest percentage of "all Jews," as indicated in the graph. But they also have the highest number of synagogue members. The other group identified in this study as "No Denomination" is of particular interest to me for my understanding, both for this thesis and for developing my "temple without walls" in the desert. There are many who no longer identify as being part of any movement or denomination. This is precisely the group that I am targeting in the Coachella Valley to engage.

The Pew Research Center also compiled statistics about those American Jews who participated in holidays and rituals.

[13] Luis Lugo and Alan Cooperman, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Findings from a Pew Research Center Survey of U.S. Jews," *Pew Research Center Studies* (Washington D.C.: Pew, 2013), 47-70.

Table 2. Holiday Participation[14]

	Orthodox	Conservative	Reform	Non-Denominational	All Jews
Seder participation	99%	80%	76%	47%	70%
Fast on Yom Kippur	95%	76%	56%	25%	53%
Light Shabbat candles	90%	34%	10%	9%	23%
Keep kosher in home	92%	31%	7%	10%	22%

Intermarriage

The Pew Research Center also analyzed the extent to which Jews intermarried with non-Jews. According to their research in 2013, non-denominational Jews were most likely to intermarry, with almost 70% of them marrying non-Jews. Not surprisingly, the group least likely to intermarry were Orthodox Jews. Only 2% of them married a non-Jew.[15] The Pew Research Center reports that the rates of intermarriage have risen dramatically over the past 50 years. Among all Jews who married before 1970, 17% have a non-Jewish spouse. Among Jews who married in 2000 or later, 58% have a non-Jewish spouse. The trend is towards increased intermarriage, and the number of their offspring is also growing. This study bears out the reality of what is happening with many families across America and certainly in the Coachella Valley. My new and growing "temple without walls" comprises approximately 15% non-Jews who attend our services and events. For this reason, it is critically important to me that we find ways to include, engage, and involve all families in our community.

[14] Lugo and Cooperman, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans."
[15] Lugo and Cooperman, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans."

Table 3 shows the impact of intermarriage rates by laying out according to each generation, whether children had one or two Jewish parents. According to notations in their report, the numbers do not add up to 100% due to rounding.[16]

Gregory Smith and Alan Cooperman expressed that "the result is that there are far more Jews of no religion among younger generations of Jews than among previous generations, as shown in the survey report.[17]

Table 3. Number of Jewish Parents

	One Jewish Parent	Two Jewish Parents
Silent Generation	6%	92%
Baby Boomers	18%	77%
Generation X	24%	73%
Millennials	48%	48%

According to Pew data, "one in five American Jews overall describe themselves as having no religion, but there is significant variation by generation."[18]

Table 4 lays out how generation influences identity.

Table 4. Jewish Identity, By Generation[19]

Generation	Jews by religion	Jews of no religion
Greatest (born 1914-1927)	93%	7%

[16] Lugo and Cooperman, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans."

[17] Gregory Smith and Alan Cooperman, "What Happens When Jews Intermarry?" *Pew Research Center*, November 12, 2013, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/11/12/what-happens-when-jews-intermarry/3.

[18] Lugo and Cooperman, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans."

[19] Lugo and Cooperman, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans."

Silent (born 1928-1945)	86%	14%
Boomer (born 1945-1964)	81%	19%
Gen X (born 1965-1980)	74%	26%
Millennial (born after 1980)	68%	32%

While most Jews, whether they identify as religious or not, said they were very proud to be Jewish, fewer Jews of no religious affiliation felt like they belonged to the Jewish community. What is more, these same Jews polled did not feel any duty to take care of disadvantaged Jews. As a whole, the rate of giving to Jewish organizations was low among non-religious Jews. In the 2013 survey, religious Jews were three times more likely to donate to Jewish organizations than non-religious Jews.

Childrearing

When it comes to Jewish identity, another important topic is childrearing. Table 5 lays out how American Jewish families view raising their children as Jewish. The Pew Research Center reports that "two-thirds of Jews of no religion with minor children in the home say they are not raising their children as Jewish in any way."[20] I believe that until we find a way to engage and involve Generations X and Y in temple life, and in ways that may shatter some of the norms, we will not motivate them to raise their children as Jewish. Our "temple without walls" will seek to address those in intermarriages by welcoming them with open arms to have a place called home with their significant other.

[20] Lugo and Cooperman, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans."

My goal is to provide a place… a sanctuary that is inclusive and engaging them so that they connect and participate with our congregation. My desire and focus in the short and long-term future are to engage and build various opportunities for families with children – whether or not they are raising them Jewish. We started this effort just before the pandemic and have had to slow our pace and roll out dramatically. However, we will continue to test our program for several children who have already started in our soft opening. I will address this more specifically later in my thesis as I discuss other alternative shuls and my own "temple without walls" in the desert.

Table 5. Jewish Child Rearing[21]

	Jews by religion	Jews of no religion
As Jewish by religion	71%	8%
As partly Jewish by religion	15%	11%
As Jewish not by religion or some mix	7%	11%
As not Jewish	7%	67%

These statistics help us understand who we are as a people in the twenty-first century and why so many American synagogues are struggling to grow or even maintain their existence. By thinking reflectively about current demographic trends, we can begin to explore how we are going to be relevant in the future. In addition, these are the statistics we need to keep in mind as we change the paradigm of synagogue life.

[21] Lugo and Cooperman, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans."

We can perhaps learn from the evolution of synagogues in ancient times in which they seemed to have a more dynamic approach to communal life and that change happened slowly albeit long ago. It gives us an opportunity to learn that change is necessary. We can and should be open to change in our fast-paced modern world. While there is a change in both Israel and the Diaspora, it can often feel very slow and cautious in many shuls. However, many are seeking to change the paradigm of what a synagogue should look like and how it should be. Questions as to where they should meet and how they should interact, and worship continue to be asked.

There are many choices in the modern world and especially in the United States. There are three types of Orthodox sects: Modern Orthodox, Haredi, and Hasidic. Various other movements such as the Conservative, Reform, Renewal, Reconstructionist, and Trans-denominational provide additional options for those seeking a Jewish communal experience. There are also secular and cultural institutions available for those who do not wish to participate more traditionally or religiously in life but still want to embrace their Judaism.

In this chapter, I have reviewed and discussed who and where the Jewish people are, what their affiliations of religion are, how intermarriage affects and what role it plays in observance if any, childrearing and how each generation views their practice or lack of participation in temple life. This next chapter will delve into these various groups and their involvement, participation and membership in synagogues.

Chapter Three:

Temple Membership, Lack of Participation and Inclusivity

The number of Jews who attend a Friday evening or Saturday morning service is not necessarily indicative of membership rates since most Jews do not frequent their synagogue with regularity. Most synagogues are more crowded during the High Holy Days of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. They are even busier during the other Jewish holidays like Chanukah, Pesach, and Sukkot. The reality of sporadic attendance regularly begs the question: do synagogues matter in today's world? The Pew Research Center compared Jewish religious attendance to other religious groups:

> Jews report attending religious services at much lower rates than do other religious groups. Six-in-ten Christians (62%) say they attend religious services at least once or twice a month (compared with 29% of Jews by religion). Orthodox Jews, however, say they attend religious services at least as often as the most religiously committed Christian groups. Roughly three-quarters of Orthodox Jews (74%) say they attend religious services at least monthly, on par with white evangelical Protestants (75%) and black Protestants (71%).[22]

The Orthodox community has the highest percentage of participation in monthly attendance, the Conservatives at 39% and the Reform Jews at 17%.

Several reasons likely cause Jews to reject either weekly synagogue attendance or official membership. First is the cost of membership. The cost of membership varies depending on each synagogue, locale, and community. The average cost is between $1,500 and $2,900 per year.[23] Why would congregants pay such a high membership price, especially when they do not regularly attend? Why would they pay now that we are amid a pandemic and they are not able to

[22] Lugo and Cooperman, "A Portrait of Jewish Americans."

[23] Michael Paulson, "The 'Pay What You Want' Experiment at Synagogues," *New York Times,* February 2, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/02/us/the-pay-what-you-want-experiment-at-synagogues.html.

attend services in-person? While it is not uncommon for the synagogue to see a huge turnout for High Holy Day services or non-religious activities in the synagogue, this sporadic communal interest does not translate into regular attendance. The dues at many synagogues are fairly high, and these are in addition to other costs like maintenance and security fees, possible B'nei mitzvah costs, Hebrew school, and Sunday School.

Synagogue Closings

The lack of commitment to membership means that synagogues are struggling financially. According to Rabbi Daniel Judson in his book, "Pennies for Heaven" writes:

"The writing of this book coincides with a significantly heightened interest in the subject of synagogues and money because so many synagogues are feeling financially challenged."[24] He further states, "The rise of the number of free synagogues is directly tied to the recession that began in 2007. The economic downturn ignited a significant loss of membership in non-Orthodox synagogues, often as much as 20 percent." As a result of this membership loss and a decrease in dues payments from remaining members, synagogue revenues dropped, and synagogues could not raise dues rates without fearing more membership resignations. Some saw the dues model as outdated and not flexible enough to deal with this new reality.[25] The current pandemic is certainly threatening to take an even more significant toll on membership and revenues.

Some have even had to close their doors or merge with neighboring synagogues. B'nai Torah, a Reform synagogue in the Chicago area that is perched on a lakefront bluff and was once

[24] Rabbi Daniel Judson, *Pennies for Heaven: The History of American Synagogues and Money* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2018), 200.

[25] Judson, *Pennies for Heaven*.

one of the centers of Jewish life on the North Shore, closed after almost 60 years. Gregory Trotter explains why it closed:

> What necessitated the move is debatable. Debt from recent borrowing for a new building, declining membership, and a succession of rabbis in recent years were cited among the factors cited by those who have worked and worshipped at the temple.
>
> "They were unable to sustain themselves," the congregation's current and last rabbi, Sharon Sobel, said last week as she packed for her move to a new synagogue in Stony Brook, N.Y. "When a synagogue closes its doors, it's very sad for the entire community."
>
> In part, the Highland Park temple seems to have suffered from bad timing. In 2007, just before the economic recession, B'nai Torah took on almost $6 million of debt through a municipal bond sale to finance an education center, according to public documents about the transaction. Some say that burden ultimately sank the synagogue.[26]

Paula Jacobs writes about the closing of a synagogue in Massachusetts:

> Ira Novoselsky wasn't tremendously upset when Congregation Tifereth Israel in Revere, Massachusetts—the synagogue where his family had worshipped for generations—shut down in 2014. "There were only 30 members left when we closed up shop," said Novoselsky, a past president of the shul and a city councilor in Revere, a city, five miles from downtown Boston, whose once-vibrant Jewish community is now just a memory. "When even the old-timers stopped coming for the high holidays, we realized it was time to pack up."[27]

Sadly, there are many synagogues that are being faced with either merging or closing. Synagogue closings across America can be attributed to several factors. Jacobs writes," 'We are seeing a shift from synagogues with walls and pews to minyanim and havurot prayer structures and communities with less formality,' said Leonard Saxe, professor of Jewish community

[26] Gregory Trotter, "Highland Park Synagogue Closing after 60 Years," *Highland Park News,* June 22, 2014, http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/highland-park/ct-highland-park-synagogue-closing-met-20140623-story.html.

[27] Paula Jacobs, "A New Life for Ritual Objects," *Tablet*, May 5, 2017, http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/227821/a-new-life-for-ritual-objects.

research and social policy at Brandeis University and director of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies and Steinhardt Social Research Institute. American Jewish Population Project findings show that populations are shifting, which also results in synagogue closings and mergers even as new ones are emerging elsewhere."[28] Today, synagogues and places of worship face the reality of live streaming, using Zoom or various other media platforms, along with concerns for our financial viability and future.

The synagogues of today and the future face a significant challenge. To remain viable, they will have to meet the currently unaffiliated expectations while also meeting the expectations and needs of those who continue to renew their membership. Without significant and innovative change, existing members will continue to slip away. Those individuals and families who identify as secular, unaffiliated, disenfranchised, non-religious, LGBTQ, or interfaith will never join in the first place.

I believe that many would like to reconnect with their Judaism and affiliate with a local synagogue. We must determine, however, how we will effectively reach out to them. What will we do to change the conversation in our synagogues and communities in which we serve? Many Jews find services boring, tedious, dull, repetitive, predictable, and uninspiring. While we should not use such a broad brush to paint all synagogues, I believe that with the level of participation and attendance at such an abysmally low rate, we need to explore why. In the many conversations I have been part of, boredom is certainly one of the top reasons people choose not to attend. It is past time to stop talking and take action. We must do something to change things up.

[28] Jacobs, "A New Life for Ritual Objects."

A New Model

Synagogues are faced with either remaining the same or looking at different ways to change their programs to retain current members and attract new ones. Some years ago, I attended and was a member of a large synagogue in West Los Angeles several years ago. I was very intrigued by the announcement that there would be a Shabbat service and titled a "Praise—Hip Hop Shabbat Service." I had long come to know and expect this synagogue to continue its typical worship routine. However, they had many young families and children who were part of their school but not necessarily engaged in the synagogue worship life. I spoke to my former rabbi, a friend, and colleague, to inquire how and why they innovated their service. He stated that they needed to do something very different to get different results if they were to bring these younger families to embrace Judaism beyond their children's education. I do not believe that it is a question of right or wrong but knowing who your audience is or want it to be, introducing programming that invites and includes them into the service.

I did not know what to expect as I walked into the dimly lit sanctuary. Hip-hop music was playing, and the colored lights were flashing. Along with their parents, children were everywhere, waiting in anticipation for the service to start. I was mesmerized, excited, entertained and amused as I watched and participated in this highly unusual service. I reminded myself that my mind and attitude needed to open to this new paradigm. This experience reinforced to me that to engage the younger families and youth, we have to think beyond the norms.

My new "temple without walls" is trans-denominational. In light of earlier statistics showing that 30% of Jews are classified as "other"—meaning that they have no denomination—this large number of Jews not attending shul even monthly was more than enough to create this

"temple without walls." Very important was the idea that worship does not need to be confined by labels. The vast majority of my congregation—both members and congregants—are not interested in being labeled. Wertheimer writes of former reform progress:

> Federations of Jewish philanthropy have created commissions designed to improve synagogue life. Individual congregations, too, were caught up in efforts at self-reform, hiring professional consultants to guide their "revisioning" of themselves as "caring communities." Much of this activity was prompted by a barrage of criticism from communal leaders and rabbis bemoaning the sorry condition of Jewish congregations. "I don't like going to synagogue," confessed Edgar M. Bronfman, head of the World Jewish Congress. "I generally find the atmosphere stultifying, the services overly long, boringly repetitive, and mostly without meaning to the young Jews of today."[29]

Sadly, in my experience, Jews, both young and old, make very similar comments. I have attended far too many services that are lifeless and lackluster. The music was more like a dirge than a celebration. Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, Executive Director of Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations, once expressed that services lacked "emotional power" and left attenders "spiritually numb."[30] Given this reality, is it any wonder that Jewish attendance and participation across denominations is in serious decline?

South Korea has very few Jews. The study of the Talmud is mandatory in this country. Ma Young-sam, the South Korean ambassador to Israel, told reporters how all Korean elementary-age students read the Talmud.[31] The South Koreans understand that the study of the Talmud is critical for their children because they have suffered oppression much like the Jews. In response to their history, they have decided to combine religious study with the secular to

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[29] Jack Wertheimer, *The American Synagogue: A Sanctuary Transformed* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 1995), 4.

[30] Wertheimer, *The American Synagogue.*

[31] Tim Alper, "South Koreans Learning Talmud," *Aish HaTorah*, May 28, 2011, http://www.aish.com/jw/s/South_Koreans_Learning_Talmud.html.

improve their children's lives. Why do I think this important or relevant? I believe that it demonstrates how powerful education is, and studying Talmud is high on the list for people worldwide in their quest to learn. It also reminds us that education is a key factor to attracting the youth to the elderly population. Later on, in the thesis, I will explore future educational objectives and programs that can be implemented in the synagogue and outside the synagogue.

Today perhaps more than ever, we need to remain flexible and relevant. To thrive, we need to create a model that is in keeping with the mission, vision, and values of the synagogue and the broader culture. We should never lose sight of the needs of the community we are targeting to build. So-called "shul hoppers" and "synagogue shoppers" are all looking for that element that strikes a chord within them. These terms are commonplace in our communities. Shul hopping is generally used in a positive way, and many write articles about this widespread phenomenon. There is even a Facebook page titled "Shul Hoppers." As someone who will soon be ordained, I feel that perhaps the negative connotation would emanate from clergy and temple leadership because the average shul hopper is not invested in the active and on-going support of the synagogue.

Today's shoppers, both in the secular and religious arenas, are more focused. On the one hand, they are driven by financial costs; yet on the other, they seek out a substantial and inspiring experience. Sometimes the "shul shopper" wants to find a place to attend the High Holy Days services. Robin Heinz Bratzlavsky writes that "It's that time of year again: When many Jews realize they need to find a synagogue—and fast."[32] Checklists have been developed and

[32] Robin Heinz Bratzlavsky, "Shul Shopping," *Jewish Journal*, July 29, 2010, http://jewishjournal.com/culture/lifestyle/81693/.

encouraged to help the "shul shoppers" find a place that meets their needs and expectations. Bratzlavsky goes on:

> "It's like a marriage. You want to find your spiritual home," says Rabbi Lisa Hochberg-Miller of Temple Beth Torah in Ventura. The latter stresses that finding a connection with the people at a synagogue is one of the most important things to consider.
>
> "Every place is going to have someone who is warm and welcoming when you first walk in," she says. "But do you feel that the clergy are approachable? Are there people who will talk to you during the oneg? Are there people who are friendly, other than the membership committee? You don't want to join and then find there is no one to connect with."[33]

As the High Holy Days approached us this year, synagogues hosted open houses, held innovative Shabbat services, and ran ads hoping to attract prospective members. In their pursuit of that near-perfect place, they knew what they did not want and, at the very least, had an idea of what they were seeking. This year, however, was different. We held our High Holy Days services via live stream since in-person worship and gatherings were prohibited. As consumers, we are informed by all the choices we have in the secular and religious worlds. Whether it be alternative or traditional, the challenge for the synagogue is to figure out what attracts their community and congregants. Bratzlavsky writes of what Hochberg-Miller said the focus should be:

> Instead, Hochberg-Miller says the financial commitment should be looked upon as helping to create and sustain your local Jewish community.
>
> "There is nothing more affirming in your Jewish identity than [helping to] sustain a synagogue," she says.
>
> Before you visit synagogues, develop a checklist:
> If you have young children, does the congregation offer a preschool?
> If you are dating, do they have singles activities?
> How many days a week would the children attend Hebrew school? Some temples offer two-day- or three-day-a-week programs.

[33] Bratzlavsky, "Shul Shopping."

> If you are an interfaith family, is the non-Jewish spouse able to participate in temple life?
> Does the synagogue feature a youth group affiliated with NCSY (Orthodox), USY (Conservative) or NFTY (Reform)?
>
> Once you have your list, start calling temples in your area and make appointments to visit. Better yet, drop by a Shabbat service and see first-hand how the congregants interact and how the services flow. Check out a couple of temples and decide which one fits your family best.
>
> Still not ready to commit? Some synagogues allow you to apply the cost of High Holy Days tickets to the price of membership if you decide to join later.
>
> Find your connection: "L'Dor V'Dor," Hochberg-Miller says. "You want a synagogue where you and your family can stay for life."[34]

As Hochberg Miller expresses, the choice of where someone attends synagogue should be a well thought out decision. For this reason, the stakes are incredibly high for synagogues.

In this chapter, I have explored participation and attendance or lack of, along with those who are shopping for the right fit for themselves that included their wants, desires and needs for programming. Next, I will examine the various factors that should be considered when reimagining and recreating the temple of today and the future.

[34] Bratzlavsky, "Shul Shopping."

Chapter Four:

Creating and Developing the Synagogue of Today and The Future

Many factors need to be considered when creating the synagogue of the future or reinventing the existing shul. For it to be successful, we needed to hone in on several things. The Coachella Valley already has several synagogues. When thinking about creating a new synagogue, I had to ask myself what I would do differently. What programs would I stress? What programs would I abandon? What would I do to make this synagogue successful when other synagogues in the Coachella Valley are struggling?

My business experience in both the for-profit and not-for-profit worlds has taught me that to be competitive and growing both in numbers and financials; an organization needs to listen to the needs of the community. It needs to understand what makes the members of the community tick, what pulls them in, and what causes them to respond. What specifically motivates someone to financially support an organization and spread the word to others? Answering this question is key because one person cannot effectively build an organization. However, leaders must lead! I love the statement that is attributed to the late Lee Iacocca – "Lead. Follow. Or get out of the way!" While it was part of his message as CEO of Chrysler and blunt… I believe that the message is relevant for all leaders, including spiritual leaders! Lead from the front so that those participating and watching will follow and get involved and take on leadership roles.

For two years, I met with close friends, colleagues, potential congregants, actual congregants, and business leaders to understand the concerns of local Jewish residents. In particular, I consulted with the Jewish Federation of the Desert to recognize the resources needed to launch a new synagogue.

Some of the questions I posed at that time in one-on-one and small group meetings were:

- What should membership look like in terms of dues structure, cost, and terms?
- What would create value for our potential individual or family congregants?
- What are this community's greatest needs?
- What past actions in our collective history should we emulate?
- How can we retain membership and increase it?
- How will we market ourselves to the greater community?
- How can we make our services more meaningful and personal to create an atmosphere of excellence?

I wanted the answers to these critical questions. We concluded that the average dues structure with traditional bricks and mortar temples were too high and keep potential congregants from being able to participate. We discussed the need for creating value that is not necessarily driven by how many services per week or month, but that we should offer excellence in our services and educational programming while dramatically lowering the dues structure to allow more to join us and engage with Desert Outreach Synagogue. Later, in this project I address this more fully along with marketing to the Coachella Valley.

Most organizations, synagogues, and churches would be wise to emulate public and private businesses' practices. For instance, before they ever initiate the project, they could create focus groups or conduct in-depth studies and analyses of the area in which they plan to invest time, money, and other resources. Rick Warren, the famous pastor of the mega-church Saddleback Church in southern California, spent a long time exploring the people in the area

before starting his work. His vision was to create a personalized and meaningful experience for each individual in his congregation. In his seminal work *The Purpose Driven Church,* Warren explains his process and vision:

> I decided that we would make no effort at all to attract Christians from other churches to Saddleback. We would not even borrow workers from other area churches to start Saddleback. Since I felt called to reach unbelievers, I determined to begin with unbelievers, rather than with a core of committed Christians. This was not the way all the books on church starting said to do it, but I felt certain that it was what God was calling us to do. Our focus would be limited to reaching the unchurched for Christ, people who for one reason or another did not attend any existing church. We've never encouraged other believers to transfer their membership to our church; in fact, we have openly discouraged it. We don't want transfer growth. In every membership class we say, "If you are coming to Saddleback from another church, you need to understand up front that this church was not designed for you. It is geared toward reaching the unchurched who do not attend anywhere. If you are transferring from another church you are welcome here only if you are willing to serve and minister. If all you intend to do is attend services, we'd rather save your seat for someone who is an unbeliever.[35]

It is not my plan to become a "mega-temple without walls." There are many large synagogues worldwide, but I am not aware of any that consider themselves to be a "mega-temple." E. F. Schumacher, in his book "Small is Beautiful," states the following: "Even today, we are generally told that gigantic organizations are inescapably necessary; but when we look closely, we can notice that as soon as great size has been created there is often a strenuous attempt to attain smallness within bigness."[36] This is and has been an issue within growing organizations. This is a comment that I have heard echoed many times before the pandemic… of some who worry that with our growth is concern that we will lose that small family feeling.

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[35] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 39.

[36] E.F. Schumacher, *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1973), 68.

While some of our programming had to be put on hold due to the pandemic, it is absolutely part of our mission and vision to return to and build upon our chavurah – small groups to not only maintain that small and familiar family feeling but also to encourage and promote spiritual growth.

We do not have to look any further than our local Starbucks to understand that this company sells an experience as much as they sell coffee. This is the foundation of Starbucks' success. Anyone can sell coffee, and coffee drinkers can find a much cheaper cup of coffee. This begs the question: why would anyone pay more for a cup of Starbucks coffee? Why do they choose Starbucks over McDonald's? Or why do they not make coffee at home? Religious leaders need to realize that Americans have become accustomed to getting meaningful and personal experiences everywhere we go. It would be foolish for us to think that our congregants would expect any less from us!

In my long professional career, I have learned that if we can create a personal and meaningful experience, it is possible to engage people and grow one's business. One only has to look to many local businesses to gain an understanding of what it means to create a personal and meaningful experience whether talking about ambience, changing the culture to be inclusive and inviting, or making and taking the time to truly get to know someone as discussed earlier.

I do not believe that a synagogue's approach needs to be any different. We need to learn how to build an alternative temple that meets people's needs where they are in their daily lives. The terms synagogue and temple and other synonyms such as "shul" are interchangeable. I believe that the experience we create in our synagogues or in "the temple without walls" I have worked so hard to create needs to be grounded in individuals' daily lives. It needs to transcend the ordinary. We have all had those moments—albeit perhaps far too few—when we have an

amazing experience that provides us with that “wow factor.” Why should we not have those same experiences when we worship as a community? It is my goal that I, along with my team, create those meaningful and deeply personal, and collective “wow” moments for every service, every holiday, and every gathering.

The Drivers of Success

How many times have you attended a service at a temple, whether at home or perhaps on vacation, and been inspired? How many times have you noted how personable or engaging the rabbi or cantor was with their congregation? More likely, you thought to yourself: when is this going to be over? Either you felt like you were going to die of boredom, or you recognized their intellectual abilities but still found that they had no personality. Perhaps they could sing beautifully but could not interact with their congregants one on one. Such clergy have unfortunately led to the bankruptcy and eventual demise of synagogues. This has been brought about through various circumstances, including infighting between the rabbi and the board and scandals involving clergy. Synagogues sometimes fail due to either a charismatic leader leaving or the lack of leadership and charisma by a rabbi or cantor.

Another key factor is having a mission and a clear values statement that change as the congregation changes. It is not enough to have a statement; it must be revisited often and brought to the community's consciousness. Leadership should converse with the community about their mission. It must become a working, living, and breathing part of the fabric of the temple. Every action and vote should take this mission into account. Both in the short term and the long term, leaders need to be willing to tweak and change the organization as it grows and develops. If the rabbi and the rest of the leadership lack a plan for excellence, sustainable growth will not occur,

and the mission will fail. The entire team must be united, even if they fail to vote the same way. In short, all involved parties, from the rabbi down to the congregants, must be focused on the greater good of the congregation and the broader Jewish community.

Both businesses and religious institutions fail because they lack a plan for the future. The immediacy of today clouds the ability to focus on future plans. I have spent most of my career involved in the management of large Fortune 500 companies and others. These have included small and large organizations and for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. I was fortunate to learn that the key to significant growth is having an annual plan and having a game plan for the following year and a strategic plan for the next three to five years. In many cases, we even had an outline for growth beyond that point as well.

The difference between having a strategy and not having one is the difference between success and failure. A plan gives the leadership of an organization the ability to chart the path and choose the strategy that best fits their mission, vision, and values. It is critical to understand the demographics and socio-economic status of the area. The plan should also take into account other temples and Jewish organizations already in the general vicinity. This helps the leadership determine who the potential congregants are and how the shul will brand itself to drive growth.

The Vision and Its Logic

The vision set out and defined by any organization's leadership, especially that of a synagogue, is key to driving the mission. Where there is no vision, the people cast off restraint; but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.[37]

[37] Proverbs 29:18.

Vision Questions

The vision statement should be clear and concise. It should inspire and motivate since it will serve as a guide to leadership and the congregation. This will enable the synagogue to become a successful business and a strong place of worship and community. Some important questions to ask are:

- Is the vision clearly defined?
- Is the vision sustainable?
- Does the vision bring the actions and decisions of the leadership and the congregation into alignment?
- Will the vision enable the congregation to attract new congregants?
- Does the vision statement account for both the intellect and the emotions of future congregants?
- Will the vision motivate the community want to become part of the shul?

The word “vision” itself is forward-thinking and allows us to imagine future possibilities and how we can impact the community and congregation we wish to serve. I have long been a fan of both Disney and Starbucks' business models, in part due to their long histories, successful outreach, and their abilities to create happiness for millions of customers. I believe their mission and vision statements are telling of their success.

Disney

On their webpage, Disney lists their concise mission statement:

> The mission of The Walt Disney Company is to be one of the world’s leading producers and providers of entertainment and information. Using our portfolio of brands to

> differentiate our content, services and consumer products, we seek to develop the most creative, innovative and profitable entertainment experiences and related products in the world.[38]

Disney started with one park in the greater Los Angeles area over fifty years ago. Today they have theme parks around the world. The website lays out this history clearly: ["Disney's stories, characters and experiences reach consumers and guests from every corner of the globe. With operations in more than 40 countries, our employees and cast members work together to create entertainment experiences that are both universally and locally cherished."][39] As congregants, shul shoppers, and consumers, we are informed and make choices based on experiences in our daily lives. It is very clear to me that just as one goes to beautiful theme parks, coffee shops, and elsewhere… we have become accustomed to a certain expectation and level of excellence that we want and, in fact, demand. I am not suggesting that we should become entertainment centers, but I am convinced the status quo and delivering the expected boring rituals in our services will only continue to accelerate our decline in participation.

The Disney experience enhances and enriches millions of lives, from the very young to the very old. They do that by creating a unique entertainment experience that uses music, costumes, characters, and enduring themes. The most important element in all of this for Disney is to create unparalleled customer satisfaction and a fun and memorable experience for children and adults alike.

[38] Walt Disney Marketing, "Our Mission," *The Walt Disney Company*, accessed November 3, 2020, https://thewaltdisneycompany.com/about.

[39] Disney Marketing, "Our Mission."

Starbucks

Like Disney, Starbucks clearly lays out its mission statement and values on its corporate webpage:

> OUR MISSION
>
> To inspire and nurture the human spirit—one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time.
>
> OUR VALUES
>
> With our partners, our coffee and our customers at our core, we live these values:
>
> Creating a culture of warmth and belonging, where everyone is welcome.
>
> Acting with courage, challenging the status quo and finding new ways to grow our company and each other.
>
> Being present, connecting with transparency, dignity and respect.
>
> Delivering our very best in all we do, holding ourselves accountable for results.
>
> We are performance driven, through the lens of humanity.[40]

The Starbucks mission statement is succinct, powerful, and very personal. They focus on how they seek to welcome everyone. My research indicates that this approach would also benefit the mission of alternative and creative temples.

The internet, social media, and the wide-spread use of technology have forced us both in the private sector, public sector, and now in religious life to examine and decide how we will

[40] *Starbucks*, "Our Starbucks Mission Statement," accessed November 4, 2020, https://www.starbucks.com/about-us/company-information/mission-statement.
.

participate and what changes we will make to be relevant and current in our modern world. Starbucks and Disney are at the forefront in creating an amazing experience and delivering excellent customer service. Why shouldn’t a synagogue be stepping up to the plate and making a huge difference in our community's lives? The next chapter will examine who is our potential congregant by demographic groups.

Chapter Five:

Our Potential Congregants

To determine a strategy for creating a temple without walls, we need to understand several potential congregants' categories. What exactly is each demographic looking for? Does it matter? Should we cater to their direct wishes? My professional experience has affirmed my belief that whether it is Disney, Starbucks, or the funeral business in which I focused for most of my career, customers are accustomed to "feeling and having an experience" with a cup of coffee or in a theme park. This will be the same for those who seek an experience in a synagogue. For this reason, we have a choice. Either we create an experience that can move our audience beyond the traditional into one that is personal and meaningful, or we stick to many of the same practices and routines that we have been doing for centuries. This may mean that we have to do away with traditional settings, buildings, rituals, and rules.

Indeed, we will need to create new ways and techniques to reach future congregants. This requires a willingness to be flexible and adaptable to the needs and wishes of those we encounter. The Pew Report analyzed above indicated that many Jewish denominations are witnessing a decline in attendance, participation, and membership. This can also be seen in many Christian churches, although not in all of them. One church I encountered in my research lacked a set place to worship. Providence Church in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, meets on Sunday mornings at various locations, including hotel meeting rooms, schools, movie theaters, and even city parks. The pastor explained how they eventually developed their concept of "Worship Without Walls:"

> What we found a year or so in, though, was it that it becomes easier and easier to just have "church" on Sunday mornings and not be the church in the community. It was out of this tension that we organized and held our first Worship Without Walls in 2010. On Worship Without Walls Sunday, instead

> of worshiping for an hour in our middle school gym, we worship God by serving our community. We communicate that worship takes on many forms, and instead of a worship service, we worship through service. The projects are varied, and we have projects that are accessible to all people.[41]

Providence Church is part of a larger grassroots movement across the nation of people forming groups to recreate worship, community, and a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. They are doing so outside the restrictions of traditional worship. Pastor Jacob Armstrong is from Gen X. He has and is creating a community that does not always follow the norm. He states, "I'm pumped about our building because of what we get to imagine together," Pastor Jacob Armstrong told the congregation during the final service at West Wilson Middle School.

Members of the church sat on bleachers and folding chairs as the gym's basketball hoops hovered overhead. They listened intently as Armstrong, 35, recounted how Providence's dream to reach those who feel disconnected from God and church manifests itself in overseas charity work, special-needs ministry, and more.[42]

Demographic Groups

Millennials

Millennials recently grew to become the largest generational population group in the United States. They are followed by the recently dethroned Baby Boomers. Millennials, and then Gen X.

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[41] Upper Room Writer, "What Is Worship Without Walls," *Upper Room*, July 24, 2014, http://books.upperroom.org/2014/07/24/worship-without-walls/.

[42] Holly Meyer, "Finally in its own home. Mt. Juliet church a model in growth," *The Tennessean*, March 26, 2016, https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/religion/2016/03/26/finally-its-own-home-mt-juliet-church-model-growth/81443974.

Millennials are not only the future of business, commerce, and industry but also of our synagogues and places of worship. Born between the years of 1980 and 2000, they number over 72.1 million.[43]

Given how many Millennials there are, it is important to understand what they are looking for and what kind of programs we can develop to attract them to our congregations. According to Thom Ranier, an American writer, researcher, speaker, and current president and CEO of LifeWay Christian Resources, an entity of the Southern Baptist Convention in Nashville, Tennessee. Ranier writes of how he is often asked about the worship styles of the Millennials:

> Typically, the context of the question emanates from a background of nearly three decades of "worship wars." In other words, on what "side" are the Millennials? Traditional? Contemporary? Or somewhere on the nebulous spectrum of blended styles? And though Jess and I did not originally ask those questions in our research, we have sufficient anecdotal evidence to respond. And our response is usually received with some surprise. The direct answer is "none of the above."[44]

Given that we are inundated and surrounded by so many different levels of interactions, whether it be through media, television, music, technology, or other methods employed to get and hold our attention… it is critical that we will need to find ways to blend various methodologies to attract the Millennial's, Gen X, and even the Baby Boomers. Synagogues are not exempt from this any longer if they truly want to retain membership and, even more important, if we are to stop the decline and grow. Rainer goes on to discuss how Millennials view worship:

> You see, most Millennials don't think in the old worship war paradigm. In

[43] Richard Fry, "Millennials overtake Baby Boomers as America's largest generation," *Pew Research*, April 28, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/28/millennials-overtake-baby-boomers-as-americas-largest-generation.

[44] Thom S. Rainer, "What Worship Style Attracts the Millennials?," *Thom S. Rainer: Growing Healthy Churches Together*, April 2, 2014, https://archive.thomrainer.com/2014/04/worship-style-attracts-millennials.

> that regard, "style" of worship is not their primary focus. Instead, they seek worship services and music that have three major elements.
>
> 1. They desire the music to have rich content. They desire to sing those songs that reflect deep biblical and theological truths. It is no accident that the hymnody of Keith and Kristyn Getty has taken the Millennials by storm. Their music reflects those deep and rich theological truths.
>
> 2. The Millennials desire authenticity in a worship service. They can sense when congregants and worship leaders are going through the motions. And they will reject such perfunctory attitudes altogether.
>
> 3. This large generation does want a quality worship service. But that quality is a reflection of the authenticity noted above, and adequate preparation of the worship leaders both spiritually and in time of preparation. In that sense, quality worship services are possible for churches of all sizes.[45]

Rainer also discusses how Millennials value teaching above worship style:

> Millennial Christians, and a good number of seekers among their generation, are gravitating to churches where the teaching and preaching is given a high priority. They are attracted to churches whose focus is not only on the members, but also on the community and the world. Inwardly focused congregations will not see many Millennials in their churches. And you will hear Millennials speak less and less about worship style. Their focus is on theologically rich music, authenticity, and quality that reflect adequate preparation in time and prayer.
>
> But they will walk away from congregations that are still fighting about style of music, hymnals or screen projections, or choirs or praise teams. Those are not essential issues to Millennials, and they don't desire to waste their time hearing Christians fight about such matters.[46]

While Rainer's thoughts specifically address the potential young churchgoer, they are also relevant to young Jews in the Millennial generation, Gen X, and Baby Boomers. Ranier makes the argument that the person attending a worship experience is looking for more than the average or usual but are serious about wanting to have their needs met by a worship service that employs the richness of an experience in worship, authenticity in what they perceive and experience as

[45] Rainer, *What Worship Style Attracts the Millennials*.
[46] Rainer, *What Worship Style Attracts the Millennials*.

genuine, and certainly quality in the way that it is delivered. To find similar synagogues, one need look no further than places like IKAR in Los Angeles or Mishkan in Chicago, or many other hip shuls that have sprung up in recent years. IKAR and Mishkan have taken the very components Ranier discusses in his article and employs them to create their worship style.

When one walks into the worship service at IKAR, you will sense and quickly understand that the service is filled with rich content, authenticity, and quality. Their sanctuary is filled primarily with Millennials and Gen X. However, the Baby Boomers also show up in good numbers. These synagogues' success rests in their passion, fervor, music, intellectual study of the text, stimulating programs, and social action activities. In short, they deliver something that is relevant to Millennials, Gen X, and Baby Boomers.

Baby Boomers

The Baby Boomer generation is also a very large demographic group. They are the second-largest segment of the American population, numbering 71.6 million, they outnumber Generation X and are almost as numerous as the Millennial generation.[47] The American public is getting older, and the Jewish community is turning gray even more quickly than the rest of the United States. Adam Chandler writes of his trend in the Jewish community:

> As baby boomers hit their 50s and 60s, the United States as a whole has gotten older, but Jews have seen an especially notable demographic shift. By the turn of the millennium, the median age of American Jews was 42—far older than the overall American median age of 35. In 2007, 18 percent of American Jews were 65 or older, compared to just 12 percent of all Americans. And thanks to factors like delayed parenting, a record-low birth rate, and the aging of baby boomers, Americans in general—and American Jews in particular—will see these trends continue for years to come.
>
> As Jewish America gets older, synagogues have begun to adapt to serve their older members and attract new ones. The creation of age-specific social

[47] Fry, “Millennials overtake Baby Boomers.”

> groups, senior-themed educational initiatives, and innovations to make both Jewish ritual and synagogues themselves more accessible for an older set constitute just some of the widening efforts to retain and attract an older demographic. Given the complexity and diversity of Jewish populations across the country, the changes are manifesting themselves differently in different places: Some focus on older congregants' centers on boomers in their 50s or 60s, for instance, while others shuls are catering to seniors who are 65 and older. How specific communities across the country address their changing memberships may differ, but the broad contours of the shifts under way can be gleaned from looking at shuls that are reprioritizing their outreach efforts.[48]

During my years of rabbinical school, I learned that several of my classmates and colleagues were only interested in serving this specific age group and catering to 65 and older seniors. They serve in various ways and varying places such as 55+ communities, Assisted Living facilities and rented spaces to accommodate their needs.

As a rabbi who serves a fast-growing temple in the desert where most congregants are Baby Boomers, I have found that they are looking for many of the same things that the Millennials seek. First, they desire the music to have rich content that is both secular and sacred, Jewish and other. Second, they desire authenticity in a service that embraces their history, culture, and tradition and includes creative and alternative aspects. Many, if not most, have left the synagogue a long time ago and are ready for something new that welcomes them and invigorates their spirit and soul. This large segment of the population wants a quality service that embraces the later stage of their lives while also welcoming the younger generation. In short, they want a religious experience that appeals to an integrated blend of people. I believe that spiritual health is extremely important in every way possible. My experience has been that creating a thriving spiritual environment is contagious and draws others in as attendees relive and

[48] Adam Chandler, "As the Jewish Community Goes Gray, Synagogues Adapt to Serve Older Congregants," *Tablet Magazine*, January 6, 2014, https://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-life-and-religion/155916/synagogues-older-congregants.

tell their experience through worship at Desert Outreach Synagogue to those in their own communities and, as a result, increases membership growth also. I do not believe that success is defined by the size of our congregations but by the impact of our services, the connections and conversations that happen to result, and constant feedback. We live for and long for that connection to each other, which is why I believe that the experiences we are part of and feel in our visits to Starbucks or other local coffee shops confirm my sentiments of our need to nurture our spirits.

Much more could be written about the other generations and their interests and desires. However, given that the Millennials, Gen X, and the Baby Boomers make up the largest segment of our population in the United States, and also the studies bear out that people across the spectrum are looking for the fresh and unique perspectives on worship, it makes sense to focus our efforts on these generations. A future temple without walls must be creative in how it both embraces tradition and innovates simultaneously. Next, I will showcase and discuss various alternative “temples without walls” that others have implemented to change and encourage better participation and involvement in their communities.

Chapter Six:

The Temple Without Walls: Studies of the Alternatives

As I researched existing "temples without walls" or the more traditional shuls seeking to innovate, I saw a common trend. Both wanted to be relevant to our current culture, which meant becoming more secular and less religious. In this chapter, I will discuss six alternative shuls around the country. These growing synagogues have a refreshing take on motivational leadership. They are using innovative approaches to bring life back into a community that was either failing or dead. The methodology and approach of these fascinating temples are quite similar in many cases, yet there are stark differences. The target audience and congregants vary based on community demographics and the socio-economic status of the area. Also, the rabbi's mission and vision, along with the desire and wishes of other leaders like the cantor, influence the shul's vision.

The Various Types of Minyanim

Nefesh Minyan

An important question we need to ask is, why are people drawn to these alternative places to worship? JLife (Orange County Jewish Life) tackled this question in its article titled "Worship without Walls:" They found that the majority either wanted to connect with others in the Jewish community or try something new while also not letting go of tradition entirely. Jlife discusses the Orange Country Nefesh Minyan located in Irvine, CA, which it describes as "the group of choice for many 20-and 30- something's, both married and single." The news source goes on to provide

the institution's history:

> Conceptualized in 2008 by Rabbi Jocee Hudson, then director of lifelong learning at Temple Beth Sholom, and funded by Jewish Federation & Family Services as part of the Young Leadership Division, the group is "a community of young adults that people enjoy, because their peers are in attendance," according to its chair, Julie Amster. "It's very fulfilling," said Amster, who described Nefesh Minyan participants as "not yet affiliated," adding, "it helps people to connect on a religious level."[49]

The success of Nefesh Minyan reveals the loud call for change within Judaism. At services, they regularly attract about one hundred people. Their very own choir known as "Shir Energy" leads their music. Sometimes they bring in other entertainers like Jewish blues artist Saul Kaye from San Francisco. This age group generally has no desire to join the synagogue and only want to attend the holidays. Yet somehow Nefesh Minyan attracts them at other times of the year, in large part because it provides a place that caters to their needs and wishes. Partnering with the Nefesh Minyan is Shalom Family, an organization coordinated by Stephanie Epstein. She describes what the Jews she serves are seeking: "Our constituents want to get to know other young families and connect with the community. We want to help them navigate on their Jewish journey."[50] According to the article in JLife, about 45 families, most of which are unaffiliated, attend services and events once every quarter.

I have gleaned through my attendance and observation, along with the enormous research that I have been deeply immersed in, that this 20-and 30-something group is very interested in participating and being involved but in different ways that typically embrace much of the traditions but employ alternative and current methods to create excitement, energy, and allow them to have their voices heard in changing Judaism. They are absolutely passionate, articulate,

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[49] *Jlife: Orange County Jewish Life*, "Worship without Walls," July 31, 2013, http://jlifeoc.com/worship-without-walls/.

[50] *Jlife: Orange County Jewish Life*, "Worship without Walls."

and engaged in getting their message heard.

Surf City Synagogue

The Surf City Synagogue is another example of a shul that meets outside the brick-and-mortar building walls. By creating their version of a synagogue, they can better meet families' needs without carrying the financial burden of a building. It all started when Surf City decided to hold High Holy Days services at their local library, the Huntington Beach Central Library. Also, their religious school met in a local church. This happens to be the shul that my good friend and former classmate, Eric Dangott, led for the High Holy Days services this year.

Currently, the Surf City Synagogue holds its services in Costa Mesa. But that could change at any time. The beauty of not having their own building or renting a place is that they have the flexibility to move as needed or desired. This congregation is made up of all age groups and is egalitarian. While they are a small, their flexible approach adds vibrancy to their worship.

I believe that with most “temples without walls,” and the growth that we see demonstrated in the examples that I am providing, also comes the need for flexibility, adaptability, and understanding that change will happen, and that includes the need for changing spaces to accommodate growth.

Young Israel of OC

The Young Israel of OC is a “temple without walls” that is already seven years old. Like the above synagogues, this modern Orthodox congregation based in Irvine, California, has realized the importance of meeting their community’s individual needs. Young Israel recognizes the challenges that come with owning and maintaining a building, even as they recognize the

unique challenges of not owning a permanent building. Leading rabbi Dov Fischer expressed how they lacked a sign out front and had no specific way to mark their existence in the neighborhood.[51] Their website describes themselves as "the little shul that's hard to find. With no building (yet) of our own, we hold our main services along Jewish Irvine's "Synagogue Row" at the Back Bay Conference Center at Michelson & Harvard above the "Irvine Lanes" bowling alley."[52]

With that description and others, Rabbi Fischer articulates very well that this is a different kind of place. The people, the culture, and the music make this synagogue the place that it has become. Fischer states: "So a different kind of shul takes shape, where the people themselves become bricks and mortar—the central building blocks—and therefore the congregation leads by finding its voice from within." He goes on to say that, "when you worship without walls, you unexpectedly evolve a culture that is not bound by preconceived external limits and approaches everything as possible."[53]

Wendy's Shabbat

A group of elderly people from Sun City Palm Desert also attend Desert Outreach Synagogue in Palm Desert, and it was through a few of them that they informed me of their "Wendy's Shabbat." I have come to know these wonderful people, most of whom are in their eighties and nineties. Their service emerged out of a discussion with Sharon Goodman in which they expressed their desire for a weekly Shabbat dinner. Sharon Goodman and her husband moved from Los Angeles about 16 years ago to Sun City, CA. Sharon founded "Wendy's

[51] National Council of Young Israel, "YICO Mission Statement," accessed November 5, 2020, *Young Israel of Orange County*, https://yioc.org/about-us/.

[52] National Council of Young Israel, "YICO Mission Statement."

[53] National Council of Young Israel, "YICO Mission Statement."

Shabbat." "We were just sitting around the pool on a Friday night with nowhere to go, and we're not fancy people, so we figured, let's go down to Wendy's," Goodman says in the film.[54]

They did not know where to hold the dinner since none of them wanted the extra work of preparing and cleaning up. They decided to find a restaurant that could accommodate them. For their first Shabbat dinner, they decided to meet at the local Wendy's fast-food restaurant. Goodman recounted how, when they invited a few friends to come to the first Shabbat dinner, the typical response was, "What? Shabbat at Wendy's?" An employee at the restaurant even told them they could not do it there. This motivated Goodman to get permission from the manager. Thus, they began their journey to create a "temple without walls." I spoke to nearly all of the 20 elderly people gathered and concluded that they were not interested in institutionalized worship but rather desired to celebrate the beauty of Shabbat with their neighbors in a less informal environment that included the basic elements of Shabbat rituals to fulfill the mitzvot… satisfy their spiritual hunger and embrace the connection of friendship.

I had a fascinating conversation with the event organizers, Lou Silberman, age 95, and Gerrie Gussman, his partner of ten years. Even though the local Wendy's in Palm Desert is run by young people in their late teens and early twenties, they are more than happy to help these older people host their Shabbat meal. The management of this restaurant and the staff always make sure to reserve tables for the twenty or so people who show up to celebrate Shabbat. Lou, Geri, and their group always bring electric candles, as they are not allowed to "light" candles. In addition, they bring grape juice for the Kiddush. Rabbi Isaiah Zelden – of blessed memory was their rabbi and led their Shabbat gathering when he could this gated retirement community. After

[54] Renee Ghert-Zand, "Jewish Seniors Fight Isolation with a Fast-Food Community in 'Wendy's Shabbat'," *Times of Israel,* February 16, 2018, https://www.timesofisrael.com/jewish-seniors-fight-isolation-with-a-fast-food-community-in-wendys-shabbat.

they light candles and offer the Kiddush together, they go up and order their hamburgers, chili, fries, or whatever they choose. They share the meal, and more importantly, they share Shabbat. This small but energized group of elderly individuals still want to maintain Jewish tradition and have found an innovative way to do so. Currently, they have suspended services due to the ongoing pandemic.

Abby Mahler, a movie producer, found out about this incredible group and asked if they would allow for a documentary to be made. The documentary "Wendy's Shabbat" focuses on the regular dinner attenders and features interviews with the fast-food restaurant staff. One of the young Wendy's employees expressed that they remind me of my grandparents. They want things a certain way and know what they like. It is an honor to serve them every week.

Rabbi Zelden z''l spoke fondly of the fast-food restaurant and how they enabled them to gather: "Where else can you go and for $4.00 get a hamburger, French fries, drink, or chicken nuggets? It is a place where people of our own community can be together, schmooze and celebrate the traditions that we grew up with and have not forgotten.

The Shul in Cleveland

After twelve years at Congregation Bethaynu in Pepper Pike (that later merged with B'nai Jeshurun –a Conservative temple), a small affluent town on the east side of Cleveland, Ohio, Edward Sukol left his position as senior rabbi to start a new and different type of Jewish community. Sukol, a graduate of Hebrew Union College – a Reform Seminary, wanted to leave the comfort and security of a large synagogue of about four hundred families to found a "temple without walls." He called this new concept "The Shul," and some of the congregants followed him to this new religious experience. With the flexibility to meet wherever and whenever The

Shul can better meet its community's fluctuating needs. The group meets twice a month in the homes of its congregation. Comprised of the young and old, the organization also has a Shabbat potluck.

Rabbi Sukol's shul is not weighed down by heavy governance and bureaucracy. They have no board to approve or not approve the agenda of any meetings or the order of Shabbat services. Topics do not have to be cleared through a ritual committee or board. Instead, Sukol decides what direction the community will go. At Bethanyu, he was well known for leaving the bimah and interacting with the congregation. This is something that he still loves doing with his current community. The article details how Rabbi Eddie, as he is known by his congregants, meets people where they are: "He leads study groups in a restaurant and a bookstore and helps prepare teens for their bar or bat mitzvahs at his Pepper Pike home. 'Rather than expecting people to come to me, I am going out to them,' he said."[55] His approach is both educational and spiritual.

One of the key factors that led to his decision to create this alternative synagogue was to "offer a different experience to those within the Jewish community whose needs and interests were not being addressed adequately or fully by existing communal organizations. His outreach is to those who are disaffected, unaffiliated, interfaith couples and baby boomers."[56] Sukol calls it "Cleveland's Synagogue Without Walls." His thinking is that Shabbat starts and revolves around the home. This approach is right for both Millennials and Baby Boomers who are not interested in the traditional shul experience. Sukol goes far as to say: "If you are not prepared to

[55] Janet Fillmore, "Rabbi Creates the Shul, 'Cleveland's Synagogue Without Walls'," July 25, 2008, *Cleveland.com: Covering Northeast Ohio*, http://blog.cleveland.com/lifestyles/2008/07/rabbi_creates_the_shul_clevela.html.

[56] Fillmore*, "Rabbi Creates the Shul."*

change the rules of the game, you'd better be prepared to play alone."[57]

Traditional Temples Thinking the Alternative

There is a growing number of traditional synagogues taking a hard look at their declining numbers, lack of participation, financial reports showing loss of income stream, and overall dissatisfaction with the programming, forcing them to consider other ways of stopping the bleeding and downward spiral. It is no longer an option to continue operating in the same manner if they are to attract new members and attendees or try keeping those who have been a part of their community. As a result, there is a move to add services, change programming, incorporate yoga, NIA – which is a technique that involved both the mind and body – a physical style of aerobics, Mahjong, and various other methods of trying to think outside the box in their attempt to stay in business, to expand and for others – to grow… thus thinking and embracing the alternative is fast becoming a way of life in Judaism.

One needs to look no further than these past months as temples scrambled to figure out new and innovative ways to reach their congregations and community as the pandemic started to affect all of us. I am providing clear examples of traditional and non-traditional temples in their exploration and movement to create and reimagine the alternative.

Congregation B'nai Israel (CBI) of Tustin, CA, is a traditional conservative synagogue that realized that if they were going to reach their community, they needed to provide additional resources, programming, and locations. They started satellite locations in south Irvine and Newport Beach. Their target demographic was fortysomething Jews with children. CBI named their new project the "Wandering Minyan." Under Rabbi Elie Spitz's spiritual leadership, they

[57] Fillmore*, "Rabbi Creates the Shul."*

were able to think outside of the box and develop a "temple without walls."

Establishing these "wandering minyans" in different locations made it easier for families in these areas to attend. CBI President Beth Elster explained that "these were nearby for our families and guests who live in the coastal areas and provided a more informal minyan for those interested in a grassroots prayer experience." In the article, she went on to express that "each month services alternated between Friday night in a home one month, and Shabbat morning the following month in a community center. A potluck meal followed every service. The CBI clergy and board of directors supported the Wandering Minyan by providing the siddurim and use of a Torah. Donations were accepted to help cover the costs for the venues and other expenses. Attendance grew, and the minyan was seen as a positive extension to CBI."[58] I will be addressing my overall approach in the last chapter of this dissertation thesis.

During the summer months, they hold Friday services in a park. This allows families to pack picnic baskets full of food for their dinner. As a result of this decision, attendance has grown. The "wandering minyans" around Orange County continue to add programming such as children's services and additional educational opportunities, as well as allowing their school children to attend weekly services in alternate locations. This latter option helps families who have time constraints and battle traffic issues. Rabbi Spitz describes this as a "different kind of experience, and a compliment to the synagogue in Tustin, CA located in Orange County, CA."[59]

Congregation Bet Shalom

I was privileged and honored to have been able to spend time with Rabbi Cantor Avi Alpert of Congregation Bet Shalom in Tucson, Arizona. Avi and I were in several classes

[58] Fillmore, "Rabbi Creates the Shul."
[59] Fillmore, "Rabbi Creates the Shul."

together during rabbinical school. After hearing him speak about his synagogue, I knew that he would transform his struggling synagogue into a thriving community. Like so many, this synagogue has struggled due to many of the reasons discussed throughout my thesis regarding the aging population, board making decisions without rabbinical leadership, or in-fighting, disengagement, lack of attendance, and participation.

Rabbi Avi assumed the leadership for CBT under the condition that he would be given the authority to lead and make decisions, and the board allowed him the leeway to create change. Congregation Bet Shalom came has been in existence since 1982. The synagogue has launched some significant changes that focus on the present and the future, which is necessary if the synagogue has any chance of surviving. I asked Rabbi Avi for the opportunity to visit and interview him. My interview revolved around several questions about his unique and "out of the box" ideas and programs.

In answer to my first question— "What is your primary mission?"—he stated, "We are at a crossroads here in the United States. This may be our last chance to help Jews to reconnect. We must try to change the landscape!" To the second question—"What do you think Jews are looking for?"—he answered, "I think they are hungry for Yiddishkeit, Jewish knowledge, and Torah, and they don't know they are hungry for it. Something is missing in their lives, and they are searching."[60]

My third question was my favorite, as it tackled the prevalent mindset of so many shuls. I asked him, "What makes your synagogue different?" Rabbi Avi highlighted their first "Tribe Festival Concert" created to attract the target group of Jews in their twenties and thirties. These Jews are most at risk to not want to go synagogue anymore. In deciding how to target them, the

[60] Avi Alpert (rabbi of Congregation Bet Shalom) in discussion interview with the author, May 7, 2017.

question he asked was: “What do they know how to do? They love going to concerts and especially those that offer free food and alcohol.” Almost one hundred attended Temple Bet Shalom’s first-ever Tribe Concert in their courtyard. Their goal is to host similar concerts twice a year to attract Millennials to visit the synagogue and possibly become members.

Two of Rabbi Avi’s most significant challenges were finding this demographic and getting them to the synagogue. To reach them, he partnered with other Jewish organizations, including Hillel and the Jewish Federation, both of Tucson, AZ. This enabled him to establish relationships that would eventually increase synagogue attendance. These organizations allowed Rabbi Avi access to their contact lists. With this information, he began texting these young people and alerting them to synagogue events.

To boost attendance for the High Holy Days, they made the major decision to stop charging for the High Holy Days services. It was a risky choice, but it paid off. Temple Bet Shalom raised the same amount of money in their first year of implementing this program as they did the year prior when they still charged. Another important change the Tucson synagogue implemented was doing away with a dues structure that is typically paid annually. Instead, they transitioned to monthly giving. Avi said to me, “that Tzedakah is like a drug—it will make me want to give because it feels good.” This change has already led to an increase, according to Rabbi Avi, without getting specific.

I asked him whether attendance was greater at Friday evening Shabbat service or Saturday morning. When he stated that Saturday mornings are their best-attended service, I asked him why he thought that was the case. He felt that their Shabbat morning service, attended by about sixty people, might be better attended because they successfully combined the traditional with the modern. They removed separate seating for women and men (mechitza)

while still retaining other conventional elements such as davening/praying style and structure for their morning Shabbat services. In essence, Rabbi Avi "rebooted" the Shabbat service by taking control of the reshaping of their traditional and conservative roots and then handing the control of the service to the congregation. One of the key factors that Avi shared with me – was that he led by example, demonstrating what he expected and also to teach and show others that they could and would do the same. His desire then and now is to get the people of his congregation and community not only to attend but to participate by taking an active role in leading services.

Rabbi Avi is the type of leader and rabbi who leads by example. He takes the lead to create and set the environment, both physically and metaphysically. The congregation is strongly encouraged to lead whether by singing, leading the prayers, or chanting Torah. All are welcome to learn and participate by contributing to make this a beautiful and wonderful Shabbat morning service. Avi only gives the sermon and leads davening once a month; the rest of the time, it is up to the congregation to lead the service.

My interest in outreach led me to ask Rabbi Avi what Temple Bet Shalom is doing to reach out to the broader community. He told me that he and his wife host a Seudah Shlishit on the second Saturday of every month at 5:00 pm. Anyone from the community is welcome to attend. The goal of this "Third Meal" is to bring together local college students, young families, and seniors for a wonderful meal and service of celebration as Shabbat comes to an end for another week. They typically have about ninety to one hundred people show up for this communal event.

Alternative "Temples Without Walls"

I researched, studied, and attended a few alternative "temples without walls" to see what they were doing, what exactly my experience would be, how I perceived the feeling of those in attendance, the pro's and con's, and try to learn something that would be useful in my planning. One of my favorite Friday evening Shabbat services that I attended was at Valley Outreach Synagogue a few years ago. This "temple without walls" is an amazing example of how and what an alternative temple should be. For more than thirty years old has continued to grow into an extensive and vibrant organization.

When I drove up to the Woodland Hills Hilton in Woodland Hills, CA – which is where they met for their monthly Shabbat service at that time, I was greeted by Valet Parking Attendants who parked my car, and then upon entering the sanctuary was welcomed by friendly ushers and shown to my seat. The service started with the band playing and the room filled to capacity of several hundred. Rabbi Cantor Ron Li Paz is their spiritual leader and the force behind all of this, with Chaplain Jennifer Eaves-Nye – a former classmate of mine – serving alongside Rabbi Li Paz, and together, they make a great team. I have consulted with both Rabbi Li Paz and Jennifer Eaves-Nye as I started my planning and development. I was frequently counseled to make every experience excellent, and that quality counts more than quantity. They have generally stuck with one service per month, except bar/bat mitzvah's and celebrating other holidays and occasions.

I attended their wonderful Oneg, then made my way to pick up my car. I wondered how long it would take to get my vehicle since they park absolutely every car through the Valet service. I waited about 10 minutes for my car, and while waiting was engaged by several in conversation trying to find out who I am…etc. I had asked Rabbi Li Paz specifically how this

worked out having people wait for their cars. He told me that it was one more experience his congregation has to engage each other and that it absolutely was key to connecting people and building a sense of community. I thoroughly enjoyed it. I knew at that point that I was on to executing my vision in the desert.

There were several things that stood out to me during my visits of which were some common threads and themes being used elsewhere. Valley Outreach Synagogue was my personal favorite for many reasons. From the moment one arrived, you are met by Valet Attendants who greeted you and then to the ushers and greeters once inside the building who made sure you were welcomed properly and shown to the auditorium… and once inside the sanctuary were engaged by those around me. Rabbi Cantor Ron Li-Paz leads from the front and others follow his example in his congregation of welcoming everyone. The Torah places huge emphasis on the importance of welcoming people, to making sure they feel comfortable, and giving them your full attention–and in fact is considered a mitzvah called הכנסת אורחים "hachnasat orchim" - hospitality to guests. This is where it starts and is critical to success!

Another huge factor was the music. Valley Outreach Synagogue has a large choir and music combo that is inspiring and powerful. One cannot walk in or walk out without being moved by the quality of their music program. I have a vast background in music, piano and organ and choral performance so this was incredibly important to me and wonderful on so many levels. This was exactly the affirmation that I wanted and needed to develop, implement and execute from the beginning of founding my temple albeit with only a handful of members to start. Today our choir and combo are about twenty-four or so men and women and music is precisely one of the key factors that we are known for in the valley. I have long believed that music is also a great way to teach prayers, blessings, and text to make it more relevant, engaging

people from all walks of life, bringing generations together and elevating our worship experience. Nothing penetrates the soul and humanity like music in my opinion!

Lastly, as the service ended at Valley Outreach Synagogue and I was waiting for the Valet to bring my car up along with everyone else… it provided a wonderful opportunity for those waiting to interact with each other that we would not otherwise have a chance to speak with and get to know in an informal setting. I launched this part of the program at our first service to nudge people into conversation and begin the important building of friendships and our congregation. The next chapter will lay out in a fair amount of detail a case study along with an overview of our marketing program.

Chapter Seven:

Desert Outreach Synagogue Marketing Program and Case Study

As I seriously contemplated building and starting a new congregation in the desert, gathering statistical information, looking at the demographics, along with recognizing there are already several other synagogues in the Coachella Valley, the question that continued to come to my mind was why another temple. I was constantly reminded and told that the others were having enough problems existing and there was no chance I would succeed. However, through my observation and experiences visiting other shuls in the desert, many conversations with close friends and confidants, and a fairly clear understanding that thousands are secular, unaffiliated, disenfranchised, pushed aside, left out, and without a viable alternative to meet their needs was enough to make me realize that now was the time to do something.

I assembled a group of close friends, people from my work in the desert, interested persons who had expressed a strong desire to help me in starting a new "temple without walls." We decided on a name, incorporated, filed for a 501(c)3, and filed all the paperwork necessary to become a viable and relevant organization ready to make a difference in the desert. I quickly formed a marketing team to tackle the incredibly important work of establishing our branding, promoting our ideas, ideals, and message to the greater Coachella Valley. My goal, mission, and instruction to my Leadership Team, Marketing Team, and those who worked tirelessly to launch Desert Outreach Synagogue was to remember that to attract those who had no place to call home we must stay focused on creating a place that focuses on the needs of others and not allow our agendas to get in the way of accomplishing the greater good of service to others. We created and launched a "temple without walls where the traditional meets with the alternative and combines

with the creative," It is a place that everyone, Jewish, interfaith families, the LGBTQ community, secular, amongst many others to find a place that they can call home and want to bring others to experience the beauty of Shabbat, family, and friends.

In utilizing an alternative space that is not permanent, there are always some drawbacks. Still, I am convinced that they are a small trade-off for being saddled with a huge mortgage, high overhead expenses, capital campaigns, high utility bills, building insurance, and the weight of these obligations on the back of those who attend. We began by holding our High Holy Days services in a Golf Resort Ballroom, and our monthly Shabbat services in the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Desert. We held our monthly services at the church for fourteen months and outgrew the space. The sanctuary would no longer accommodate our growing congregation, and the community room for our Oneg was just too small. We were forced to begin looking for another space and discovered Palm Valley School in Rancho Mirage. We met there for our Shabbat services in the gymnasium for six months. We worked hard to create a sanctuary style seating arrangement and adjusting the space with a curtain to create a more intimate setting that takes the basketball hoops and school logos out of sight. Our Oneg was held on the other side of the curtain and allowed us lots of space for those attending to mix and mingle.

I was finally able to negotiate and successfully execute an agreement with the University of California to use their auditorium at their Palm Desert campus for our services. The seating capacity, ambiance, and space have allowed us to truly find a welcoming and comfortable home for all who attend. However, in the months preceding the pandemic, we were maximizing capacity in the auditorium, causing us to begin considering going to two services or again looking for a new home. We have been at UC Riverside since October 2018. However, meeting

now only virtually due to the pandemic.

The Marketing Approach from the Beginning to the Present

I founded the temple with fourteen friends, of which I knew several for many years and the others not nearly as long. We met in my living room, and I shared my dream and vision. Through our many meetings and conversation and my extensive background in marketing, and a couple of others on my team, we decided to launch Desert Outreach Synagogue with a sticker on the Sunday Desert Sun newspaper's front page. We targeted every zip code in the Coachella Valley for subscribers only to maximize immediate and quick exposure. The sticker would serve a couple of functions: a) Create brand awareness and establish our name quickly; b) Announce our High Holy Days services, which by the way, would be our very first services.

The question always lingering in my mind was, “how do we get from zero to having an audience large enough to not being considered a major flop and failure by many others in the desert?” My mission and mantra are similar to that of Pastor Rick Warren. I coached and instructed my team that we were not going after other temple members but those who did not participate or belong anywhere. I knew that everyone was watching and expecting a disaster. This marketing effort stirred up enormous interest that resulted in our new temple phone being bombarded with calls of questions, curiosity, and people registering and paying for our first High Holy Days services. It also sparked the Desert Sun to reach out to me and ask to interview me for an article published in the “Neighbor’s section” on Friday. Approximately three days later, I received another phone call from the Desert Sun telling me the response had been positive and overwhelming. Because of that, I asked if I would agree to have the article rerun on page three of

the Sunday morning paper. It was after that second publication that I knew we were off and running.

Our first service was the Rosh Hashanah morning service that was held at the Desert Willow Golf Resort in their ballroom. My team was well prepared as I had conducted numerous training and orientation meetings for the volunteers and Leadership Team to put our best foot forward. My heart was exploding with gratitude and excitement as I watched and greeted all of those who attended our very first service. All of our hard work paid off, and the ballroom was filled! The remainder of the High Holiday services were filled, and people were brimming with excitement that they had found a new home. We are on to something!

Current Marketing

The question becomes, "how do we communicate our message and create brand awareness to our congregation and community?" The answers will be presented in the remainder of this chapter, and once we are post-pandemic, we will re-evaluate our needs and focus accordingly at that time.

We continue to utilize the Sunday morning newspaper stickers for every major holiday and events as a constant reminder that we are growing and flourishing here in the Coachella Valley. Last year, we decided to take our next big step by running a sixty second TV commercial that was aired during the day from 6:00 am – midnight on three local channels: ABC; CBS; and FOX that started airing in January 2020. We also made a strategic decision to air the commercial on two major networks in Santa Barbara and Ventura counties due to the number of people who visit or live part-time in the Coachella Valley… or considering doing so. The responses we received from this campaign was also very positive. As a result, we decided to film our Friday

evening Shabbat services and edit them for weekly local TV programming to reach those unable to attend services due to being in the hospital, nursing home, assisted living, hospice, or unaffiliated. Our new television program began airing just before the pandemic locally at Noon on CBS on Thursdays and FOX at 1:30 pm every Friday.

Desert Outreach Synagogue is in its' third location since our founding in October 2016 due to growth. We hold our services at the UC Riverside – Palm Desert Auditorium except for these times of the pandemic. However, we will return once open and safe to do so. The last several months of services just before the pandemic caused us to begin considering adding a second Friday evening service or looking for another location due to our reaching capacity. We are grateful that the local TV stations aired all of our previous episodes a second time that was hugely beneficial to all of us sheltering-at-home during those first six months.

Marketing Through the Pandemic

We were presented with an opportunity to continue advertising and building brand awareness for Desert Outreach Synagogue by airing our sixty-second commercial on a nationally syndicated television show. The show will be broadcast in major markets throughout the United States and also in Canada. It will reach over 16 million viewers. The Coachella Valley is a very popular tourist destination for all – from the young to the older population for vacations and those seeking a place to retire, or perhaps enjoy a second home.

Survey

I felt that it was vital to determine as best possible who attends Desert Outreach Synagogue and sent an anonymous survey link with seven questions via SurveyMonkey to many in my congregation in October 2020. I received sixty-nine responses out of a total of 125.

The question's posed as follows with results to follow later in this project:

- What is your experience with interfaith families?
- Do you have members of your family, friends, or acquaintances that are not Jewish?
- How do you identify? Jewish? Other?
- What is your feeling about interfaith worship?
- Do you think it is necessary today?
- What is your level of participation at Desert Outreach Synagogue?

What have we learned from this survey? What impact, if any, will it have as we continue to market and create brand awareness of Desert Outreach Synagogue - our "temple without walls?" How will we move forward through this pandemic and beyond?

The results of the survey contained some elements of intrigue and surprise, yet not completely surprising. It has been very informative as it provides me and my Leadership Team clarification about how people identify and understand our current interfaith participation, worship experience, and practice. Our conversations about our future and how we proceed will need to be considered given this survey.

Before coming to my rabbinate, my instincts from my long business career are that we will need to conduct more surveys to get to the deeper meaning of our congregation and community's needs. I believe it will be essential to put together small focus groups to create

dialogue, open up the conversation for honest feedback, and garner ideas for possible inclusion in our services and programming. I summarize the results in the next chapter.

Chapter Eight:

Conclusion and Summary

There are a few notable observations that stand out to me from this survey. As I read the surveys, I became aware for the first time that the level of participation is not as high as I would have expected. The second is how my congregants identify. At first glance, one might conclude that the total Jewish choice is 89.86%. However, many identify as Jewish by birth… but live and practice as Unitarian, Atheist, or other. Respondents identifying as other than Jewish total 15.4% of the sixty-nine respondents from a possible pool of 125 that were emailed the survey and accounted for approximately one-fourth of our total. Questions four and five were left open-ended to be answered in their own words. The last question was to find out how willing they would be to recommend Desert Outreach Synagogue outside of their family as I assume that they would bring the family if visiting or local. I was more curious and interested in understanding their level of comfort with friends and colleagues. Overall, the majority of the answers were strong and positive responses. I was surprised at the number of "detractors" and those identified as "passive" with this question.

This survey will most definitely cause me to ascertain in future surveys what is the underlying reason(s) to improve the overall experience of those who responded with is how to engage them at a higher level of participation and also move the "detractors" and "passives" to "promoters." My immediate reaction is that many in my congregation are older, and as they share with me frequently…" have been there…done that" in doing anything more than showing up for Shabbat. I will continue to strive for continuous improvement in our worship services and various educational opportunities.

When someone walks in our sanctuary doors for the first time, they are met with the love and warmth of a community waiting on others to join us and be a valued member of our family. It is my firm belief that most everyone needs friendship, fellowship, a connection, and a sense of belonging. We make every attempt to welcome and assimilate everyone into our congregation and community, which is critical in building, growth, and retention. Desert Outreach Synagogue is a new and thriving congregation and community that strives to attract and serve our Jewish population, interfaith families, those who are not Jewish, any and all who are seeking a place to call home.

Imagine you find yourself walking into the sanctuary of Desert Outreach Synagogue. Upon arriving at the University of California – Riverside – Palm Desert, you will be met with greeters at the campus building entrance, where the Valet attendants will meet you and who will graciously park your car. Ushers and Greeters will direct those arriving at the auditorium's front doors– otherwise known as our sanctuary to our reception desks for those who are new to us for our welcome and to capture their names and contact information for follow up and to help seat those attending service. My intention and purpose along with my team, are that every person, every point of contact, is done so with kindness, caring, and attention to the details. Once inside, you will hear the Desert Outreach Synagogue musicians playing gorgeous music – very possibly some great jazz or ballads to welcome you to our family. The service begins, and the Choir will open with great music to sing along with, and Shabbat begins. The seats fill up… the excitement is palatable, and the room is alive. The service is highly musical and engaging to uplift and inspire all of us as we end the week and celebrate a wonderful Shabbat experience together. Our motto is: “Come join us! You already belong!”

Once the service ends, our congregation and community enjoy a wonderful Oneg with

Wine or other beverages for those who may not drink. However, there is always plenty of food and fellowship. I am still in awe that the majority seem to be in no hurry to leave. Upon exiting the building, the Valet Parking Attendants are waiting and ready to bring your car to the front doors. I am convinced that if you create a meaningful, positive, and spiritual space and service, it will attract those who are not likely to attend, may never have attended, and in return, they will bring their family and friends because they felt like they belonged and want to share that experience with others. Our motto that we live by is: "Come join us! You already belong!"

My goal is both short-term and long-term in building our "temple without walls," increasing visibility, brand identity, and congregational growth. Through these consistent and systematic efforts, I believe we have witnessed such incredible growth in a short period. It is essential to the continued development that we rebound after the pandemic and thrive into the future

Appendix A: Survey Questions

Copy of DOS - Case Study Community Research

* 1. What is your level of participation at Desert Outreach Synagogue?

0 — Engaged, participate and involved. — 100

* 2. How do you identify? Jewish? Other?

- [ ] Jewish
- [ ] Catholic
- [ ] Protestant
- [ ] Unitarian
- [ ] Atheist
- [ ] Other

* 3. Do you have members of your family, friends, or acquaintances that are not Jewish?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

* 4. What is your experience with interfaith families?

* 5. What is your feeling about interfaith worship as experienced at DOS?

1

Copy of DOS - Case Study Community Research

* 1. What is your level of participation at Desert Outreach Synagogue?

0 — Engaged, participate and involved. — 100

* 2. How do you identify? Jewish? Other?

- [ ] Jewish
- [ ] Catholic
- [ ] Protestant
- [ ] Unitarian
- [ ] Atheist
- [ ] Other

* 3. Do you have members of your family, friends, or acquaintances that are not Jewish?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

* 4. What is your experience with interfaith families?

* 5. What is your feeling about interfaith worship as experienced at DOS?

* 6. Do you think it is necessary today?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No

* 7. How likely is it that you would recommend Desert Outreach Synagogue to a friend or colleague?

NOT AT ALL LIKELY EXTREMELY LIKELY

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Appendix B: Various Marketing Methods

Other events and announcements as part of our ongoing marketing campaign:

Our second Shabbat in our new home emphasizes our appeal and approach to the secular, unaffiliated, disenfranchised… the creative and alternative…

Desert Outreach Synagogue markets and appeals to the Coachella Valley for Passover:

Desert Outreach Synagogue announces its third move due to growth…

Here we "GROW" again – We're moving!

Desert Outreach Synagogue

"Come join us, You already belong!"

Meets 2nd Friday of every month

UC Riverside-Palm Desert

75080 Frank Sinatra Dr, Palm Desert, CA 92211

760.449.0111

www.desert-outreach-synagogue.com

Our first service at UCR Palm Desert Center is Friday, October 12th – 7p

in the elegant auditorium. -----

Complimentary Valet Parking. (Lot B)

Another alternative way of Desert Outreach Synagogue celebrating Shabbat with family, friends, and community:

PREMEDITATED PRODUCTIONS PALM SPRINGS PRESENTS
duets!
A LEGENDARY MUSICAL TRIBUTE WITH HIT SONGS & FAMOUS DUETS!
Cher
Elton John
Lissa Negrin as CHER has starred on The Talk, The Late, Late Show, Nash Bridges, for USO tours, Las Vegas showrooms and Casinos worldwide.
Stephen Sorrentino as ELTON JOHN has performed on Jimmy Kimmel Live!, Hollywood Squares, Fox and NBC, for Disney, Dick Clark and Legends in Concert.
Liza
Tom Jones
Gailyn Addis as LIZA MINNELLI has performed for Stars in Concert, Legends in Concert & Tributes shows across the globe.
Lou Nelson as TOM JONES has performed at CNN, The Rockefeller Center, and countless venues worldwide.
FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2019 • SHOWTIME 7:00 P.M
UC Riverside Palm Desert Auditorium • 75080 Frank Sinatra Dr., Palm Desert 92211
This DUETS performance will help benefit our DOS music and programming!
TICKETS: $50 – PREMIER, RESERVED SEATING, LOWER LEVEL. Limited to 90 seats.
Includes Wine & Cheese Hour at home with the Rabbi – at a day, time to be announced – and a DOS Tote Bag.
$30 – GENERAL SEATING, UPPER LEVEL. Includes a DOS Tote Bag.

Desert Outreach Synagogue celebrates Chanukah in a festive way for our congregation and community…

Chanukah, oh Chanukah, Come Light Your Menorah!!

Let's Have a Party . . .

Who: Desert Outreach Synagogue

What: **Annual Chanukah Party Potluck Dairy Dinner**

Where: **Unitarian Universalist Church of the Desert**

72425 Via Vail, Rancho Mirage

When: **Friday, December 20th, 6:00 pm**

Why: **To Celebrate the Festival of Lights**

- **No charge for Temple members**

  $20 for non-Temple members
- **RSVP to 760-449-0111 by December 10th.**
- **Tell us what you'll bring for the potluck or how you can help!**
- **Please bring a new, unwrapped gift to be donated to a homeless child.**
- **Don't forget to bring your Menorah!**

Appendix C: Samples of our Desert Outreach Synagogue Marketing

2016 – Our very first to announce our temple and the High Holy Days

HIGH HOLIDAYS
DESERT OUTREACH SYNAGOGUE
"Come join us. You already belong!"
Jules King, Rabbi
Orly Campbell, Cantor
Rosh Hashanah - Monday, October 3, 2016 10am
Tashlich - Monday, October 3, 2016 2pm (Palm Desert Park)
Kol Nidre - Tuesday, October 11, 2016 7pm
Yom Kippur/Yizkor - Wednesday, October 12, 2016 10am
Regular price: $145
At door: $155
(760) 449 - 0111
Desert Willow Golf Resort
38-995 Desert Willow Dr.
Palm Desert, Ca 92260
info@desertoutreachsynagogue.com

HIGH HOLIDAYS

DESERT OUTREACH SYNAGOGUE

"COME JOIN US. YOU ALREADY BELONG!"

Rabbi Jules King

Cantor Lori Reisman

Rosh Hashanah:
Monday, September 10, 2018 – 10:00 am

Tashlich:
Monday, September 10, 2018 – 2:30 pm
(Palm Desert Park)

Kol Nidre:
Tuesday, September 18, 2018 – 7:00 pm

Yom Kippur/Yizkor:
Wednesday, September 19, 2018 – 10:00 am

Desert Willow Golf Resort
38-995 Desert Willow Dr, Palm Desert, CA 92260

Non-Member Price: $225

760.449.0111
WWW.DESERT-OUTREACH-SYNAGOGUE.COM

Desert Outreach Synagogue sticker on the front page of Desert Sun – 2017:

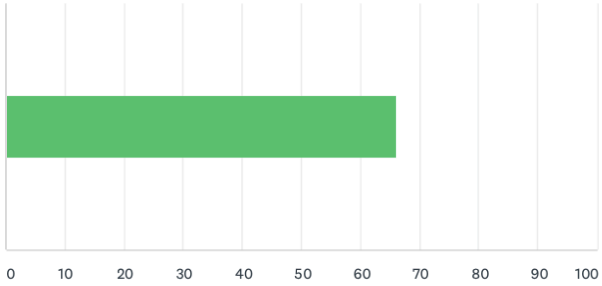
desertsun.com SUBSCRIBE: GAIN ACCESS TO ALL OF OUR CONTENT EVERY DAY
SUMMER OF LOVE
Cultural revolution born in San Francisco
ARTS & CULTURE, 1E
HIGH HOLIDAYS
DESERT OUTREACH SYNAGOGUE
EARLY BIRD PRICING: $140
REGULAR PRICING: $160
760.449.0111
The Desert Sun
SUNDAY, JUNE 25, 2017
PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK
SERVING THE COACHELLA VALLEY SINCE 1927
USA TODAY
GOP MIRED IN DETAILS OF HEALTH CARE BILL
PAGE 1B

Appendix D: Summation of Survey Questions:

DOS - Case Study Community Research

Q1 What is your level of participation at Desert Outreach Synagogue?

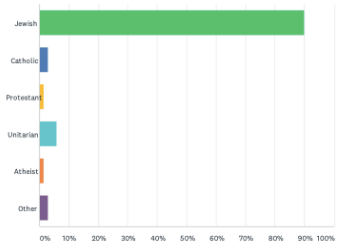
Answered: 69 Skipped: 0



DOS - Case Study Community Research

Q2 How do you identify? Jewish? Other?

Answered: 69 Skipped: 0

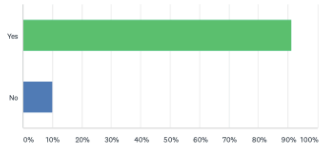


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Jewish	89.86%	62
Catholic	2.90%	2
Protestant	1.45%	1
Unitarian	5.80%	4
Atheist	1.45%	1
Other	2.90%	2
Total Respondents: 69		

DOS - Case Study Community Research

Q3 Do you have members of your family, friends, or acquaintances that are not Jewish?

Answered: 69 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	91.30%	63
No	10.14%	7
Total Respondents: 69		

Q4 What is your experience with interfaith families?

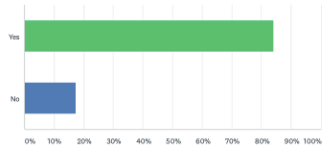
Answered: 69 Skipped: 0

Q5 What is your feeling about interfaith worship as experienced at DOS?

Answered: 69 Skipped: 0

Q6 Do you think it is necessary today?

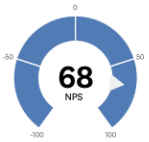
Answered: 69 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	84.06%	58
No	17.39%	12
Total Respondents: 69		

Q7 How likely is it that you would recommend Desert Outreach Synagogue to a friend or colleague?

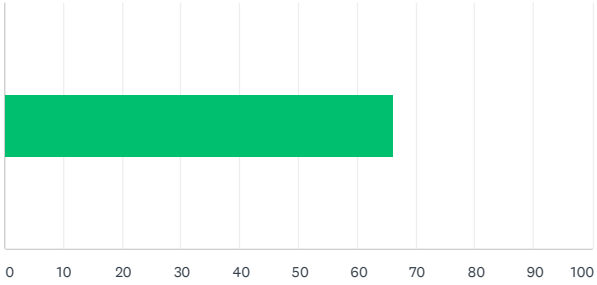
Answered: 69 Skipped: 0



DETRACTORS (0-6)	PASSIVES (7-8)	PROMOTERS (9-10)	NET PROMOTER® SCORE
7% 5	17% 12	75% 52	68

Q1 What is your level of participation at Desert Outreach Synagogue?

Answered: 69 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	AVERAGE NUMBER	TOTAL NUMBER	RESPONSES
	66	4,564	69
Total Respondents: 69			

Appendix E: Answers to Question 4

4. What is your experience with interfaith families?

I left this question open-ended to require and engage the congregant for their experience and understanding of their personal experience with interfaith families. Nearly all indicated that they had experience with interfaith families. The vast majority of responses were very positive and varied based on the impact in their own life and that of their family.

Full Answers:

Not a lot
10/22/2020 2:13 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers
CURRENT

Same as Sll the others !
10/19/2020 4:31 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers
CURRENT

good one
10/18/2020 1:46 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers
CURRENT

One is inter-faith, one is inter-racial and inter-faith
10/17/2020 9:58 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers
CURRENT

I grew up in one and know others who did as well.
10/17/2020 12:03 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

little
10/17/2020 9:37 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

My husband was brought up Catholic. When we met he was not involved in a church and had not been for years. When we got married he thought it would be a good idea if we were married by a Rabbi. After our wedding he suggested we get involved with a Church or a synagogue because he believes in being part of a community. We joined a Synagogue and took some classes together. He really enjoys going to services. Skipping ahead many years, we joined DOS. We love the Rabbi, we love the wonderful people we have met, many have become like family. My husband even learned to blow the Shofar for the High Holy Days.
10/16/2020 9:23 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I have a daughter-in-law who is not Jewish.
10/15/2020 10:34 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Open and communicative
10/15/2020 3:56 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

n/a
10/15/2020 1:08 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Same as my family
10/15/2020 12:42 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Sometimes a bit awkward, I feel like an outsider at times. I would have preferred a different scenario.
10/15/2020 12:02 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Very comfortable. They seem to be open minded about each other’s beliefs and experiences.
10/15/2020 11:47 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

positive
10/15/2020 9:32 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I have had good experience with interfaith families. Both my children are married to non Jewish people. I have become, over the years, more convinced that a similar background may not be fundamental in a relationship, but it sure helps. I'd rather have an all Jewish family.
10/15/2020 9:13 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

a lot
10/15/2020 8:54 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Good experience and good communication
10/15/2020 8:53 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Both of our children have interfaith marriages and it is working out fine
10/15/2020 8:52 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Most are extremely committed to Judaism in their home. However, one family member, after her Jewish husband died gave her kids WWJD bracelets and went back to church the week after he died. I feel that is the exception though
10/15/2020 8:22 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

good
10/15/2020 8:17 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I am part of one
10/15/2020 7:57 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Positive
10/15/2020 5:58 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

excellent
10/15/2020 5:39 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

It’s their decision
10/15/2020 3:47 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Many of my families are intermarried including me.
10/15/2020 1:09 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Daughter in law is not Jewish but practices Judaism
10/15/2020 12:37 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

We have good friends who are interfaith
10/15/2020 12:22 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

no difference
10/15/2020 12:01 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Quite a lot. All peacefully coexitant and in many cases leaning toward Jewish activities and customs.
10/14/2020 10:29 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Compatible
10/14/2020 9:52 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

very normal and the interfaith never seems to some up
10/14/2020 9:17 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Friendship, etc
10/14/2020 9:13 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Several friends.
10/14/2020 8:59 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I have no issues
10/14/2020 8:57 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

My son-in-law is gentile
10/14/2020 8:07 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

none
10/14/2020 8:03 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

limited experience, all my siblings married Jewish partners
10/14/2020 7:52 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

My husband was raised Catholic and I was raised Protestant. We both enjoy the service at DOS.
10/14/2020 7:23 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

My interfaith family practices Judaism
10/14/2020 7:15 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Not very much
10/14/2020 7:03 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Very successful
10/14/2020 7:03 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I know many. Some are cousins if mine.
10/14/2020 7:01 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

many friends and my wife is not jewish
10/14/2020 7:00 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Husband is not jewish
10/14/2020 6:59 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Significant
10/14/2020 6:50 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Not much
10/14/2020 6:38 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

All good.....many interfaith relationships in my family
10/14/2020 6:29 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Have many friends in all faiths.
10/14/2020 6:29 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Lack of a common religion is maintained.
10/14/2020 6:24 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

They usually celebrate both holidays
10/14/2020 6:20 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

many
10/14/2020 6:14 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

What are you looking for?
10/14/2020 6:13 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Good. Have Catholic daughter and grandson in-law
10/14/2020 6:13 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Mostly people I meet/ acquaintances
10/14/2020 6:05 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

With my daughter, they are bringing up the children Jewish so it is very good. My son is trying very hard to give his children a Jewish education but finding it difficult with a non Jewish wife. We don’t make religion a big deal so everyone gets along.
10/14/2020 5:53 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I've not had difficulty in sharing with other faiths.
10/14/2020 5:50 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Good
10/14/2020 5:48 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Faith is universal. And people of faith are the same
10/14/2020 5:45 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

My first marriage was out of faith, it was difficult. My sister in law is not Jewish, she is insensitive
10/14/2020 5:41 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Married to a Christian for 22 years
10/14/2020 5:25 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Not a problem at all enjoy getting prospective on other faths
10/14/2020 5:24 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I was in one before I converted to Judaism
10/14/2020 5:23 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Good
10/14/2020 5:21 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Very positive
10/14/2020 5:21 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I am married to a Christian
10/14/2020 5:19 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Lots of experience in the family my ex daughter in law is Catholic
10/14/2020 5:11 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Have many friends from interfaith families.
10/14/2020 5:09 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

It's a non-issue for me.
10/14/2020 5:08 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

They normally participate when they need a wedding, bar/bat, death or around the high holidays.
10/14/2020 5:08 PMAdd tags −

Appendix F: Answers to Question 5

5. What is your feeling about interfaith worship as experienced at DOS?

The responses varied and nearly all were positive as there are many in our congregation with spouses, partners, children, grandchildren, friends and others who are not Jewish. They have often shared with me that they have not felt included or accepted in other synagogues and appreciate having a place to call home.

Full Answers:

DOS should share more ideas from Humanists via sermons.
10/22/2020 2:13 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers
CURRENT

I like it!
10/19/2020 4:31 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers
CURRENT

No Probles
10/18/2020 1:46 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers
CURRENT

Hadn’t paid much attention, except the I realized that many of the songs were not in the Jewish tradition.
10/17/2020 9:58 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers
CURRENT

I assumed that DOS services are basically Jewish. So I don't have an experience of interfaith worship at DOS.
10/17/2020 12:03 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

accept
10/17/2020 9:37 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I love the diversity in our Synagogue. I always get a kick out of hearing our beautiful choir singing in Hebrew. Many of the members aren't Jewish and speak Hebrew better than I could ever Imagine doing. It is a breath of fresh air, especially with the hatred and antisemitism going on around the world.
10/16/2020 9:23 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I haven’t felt that the worship is interfaith except that most of the choir is not Jewish as far as I know.
10/15/2020 10:34 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Works well. People are interesting. Warm feelings
10/15/2020 3:56 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

n/a
10/15/2020 1:08 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I like it--it broadens experience

10/15/2020 12:42 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

It’s fine, I have no negative feeling toward it. I really wasn’t aware that there was anything different about it.
10/15/2020 12:02 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Very comfortable and accepting
10/15/2020 11:47 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

uncomfortable
10/15/2020 9:32 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I don't like it. I like Jewish worship, especially for Shabbat services.
10/15/2020 9:13 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

good
10/15/2020 8:54 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

OK and encouraged
10/15/2020 8:53 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

We are very open and comfortable

10/15/2020 8:52 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I think it is inviting, inclusive, thoughtful and inspiring.
10/15/2020 8:22 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

OK
10/15/2020 8:17 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Love it
10/15/2020 7:57 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Good
10/15/2020 5:58 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

inclusive and meaningful
10/15/2020 5:39 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I would prefer more jewish leaning but do like that all peoples are accepted
10/15/2020 3:47 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I was raised a little more then conservative but enjoy a mixture of conservative and reform to be understood by more of our congregants.

10/15/2020 1:09 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I think the inclusiveness of everyone is a wonderful experience
10/15/2020 12:37 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

If people are interested in being a part of our temple, they are welcome to join with us.
10/15/2020 12:22 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

wonderful!
10/15/2020 12:01 AMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

All for it.
10/14/2020 10:29 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I think it is great
10/14/2020 9:52 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

It is fine with me
10/14/2020 9:17 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

No problem as long as music is included.

10/14/2020 9:13 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I haven't experience that.
10/14/2020 8:59 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

It is ok---
10/14/2020 8:57 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I haven’t experienced a workshop yet.
10/14/2020 8:07 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

ok
10/14/2020 8:03 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

All are welcome
10/14/2020 7:52 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I sing in the choir and I love the services.
10/14/2020 7:23 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Welcoming

10/14/2020 7:15 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I think it is very warm and welcoming
10/14/2020 7:03 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I'm all for it.
10/14/2020 7:03 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Ok with me.
10/14/2020 7:01 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

everyone should be welcome
10/14/2020 7:00 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

No real feeling
10/14/2020 6:59 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Good feelings
10/14/2020 6:50 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I would like it

10/14/2020 6:38 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Love interfaith worship
10/14/2020 6:29 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Very positive
10/14/2020 6:29 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Interfaith is welcomed as long as we don’t loose too much Judaism
10/14/2020 6:24 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

We don’t know of any interfaith families at Dos but everyone is made to feel welcome
10/14/2020 6:20 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

no problem with it
10/14/2020 6:14 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I would prefer more Judaism, conversations about Jewish way Of life, etc.
10/14/2020 6:13 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I think it's great. It gives them a community to belong to

10/14/2020 6:13 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

It is vital, vibrant, and a genuine blessing
10/14/2020 6:05 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I have no problem with it and enjoy learning about different faiths
10/14/2020 5:53 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I love the fact it is open to love from everyone.
10/14/2020 5:50 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

No problem
10/14/2020 5:48 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Enjoy the people who go and very acceptance of non-Jewish members
10/14/2020 5:45 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

My life was enriched by my friendship with David Orris. He was a wonderful friend, and was a huge part of my DOS experience
10/14/2020 5:41 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I find it very inviting and open

10/14/2020 5:25 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Don't feel that would be well received.
10/14/2020 5:24 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Love it!
10/14/2020 5:23 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I applaud it
10/14/2020 5:21 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Ask long as the rituals are Jewish, it is okay.
10/14/2020 5:21 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I never ask anyone about their religion especially at temple
10/14/2020 5:19 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Very important as when I was I the army and during high school I have gone to interfaith services
10/14/2020 5:11 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

Have not had that experience.

10/14/2020 5:09 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

I love it.
10/14/2020 5:08 PMAdd tags −View respondent's answers

CURRENT

n/a
10/14/2020 5:08 PMAdd tags −

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